

# "YOUNG HONESTY" POLITICIAN



BRUCE BARKER



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*[Handwritten: I have not, John Willard]*

# “YOUNG HONESTY”— POLITICIAN

BEING THE STORY OF HOW A YOUNG RANCHMAN  
HELPED TO ELECT HIS FATHER CONGRESSMAN

BY  
BRUCE BARKER *[Handwritten: friend]*

Illustrated by  
JOHN GOSS



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“YOUNG HONESTY ”—POLITICIAN

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## FOREWORD

“**Y**OUNG HONESTY” was not his real name, just a nickname that was given to Dave Roberts after he had campaigned throughout southern Wyoming in behalf of his father when he ran for Congress. And the nickname was not given to Dave because he was a prig—it was the tribute of hundreds of people to a real, red-blooded American boy who spoke and acted according to his ideals, without fear or favour.

Born and bred on the Double Moon ranch, YOUNG HONESTY had joyfully accepted the prospect of succeeding to his father's acres and herds. He loved the vastness of the plains, the thrilling adventures which came so unexpectedly when “riding the range,” and his ability to think and act in emergencies was acquired and developed in his wholesome, outdoor life.

Being young and full of enthusiasm, however, when his father ran for Congress in a determined effort to defeat the political “ring” in their

## Foreword

county, Dave jumped into the campaign with heart and soul, doing whatever a boy could to be of assistance. Quickly he learned the difficulties of breaking the power of a gang of politicians, and before election day he knew more than many voters of the divers methods employed by corrupt "bosses" to maintain their control and rule the people for their own selfish ends.

Aroused by the stirring campaign, the voters defeated the "ring" and YOUNG HONESTY accompanied his father to Washington, as his private secretary. How he fared there and on several diplomatic missions will be told in other stories.

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# “Young Honesty”—Politician

## CHAPTER I

### ALARMING NEWS

**C**ONTENTMENT lay upon the home house of the Double Moon cattle ranch on Deep Creek, in Wyoming. From the chimney the smoke floated lazily, as though partaking of the tranquillity that encompassed the region.

Inside the house, Samuel Roberts, owner of the ranch and known far and wide as “Old Honesty,” was overhauling a saddle, while his wife bustled about preparing breakfast, assisted by two keen-eyed youngsters, Peggy and Bud.

Fair-haired and blue-eyed, the glow under their sun- and wind-tanned skins bespeaking perfect health, these youngsters, twelve years’ old and twins, seemed the personification of guileless innocence. But their looks belied them. Inseparable, splendid horsemen, they roamed

the plains and neighboring ranches at will, and their fondness for playing jokes, often harmless in conception but serious in results, had earned for them the nickname of “The Terrors.” But despite their propensities, they were favorites with ranchmen and cowboys alike, all of whom they knew well, even to their failings and shortcomings—knowledge they used with cunning in carrying out their mad pranks.

Of a sudden, the quiet was broken by the pounding of hoofs. Rushing to learn the cause of the hard riding, the twins caught their toes in the straps of the saddle their father was fixing, stumbled, and regained their footing only to fall in a heap outside the open door. But even as they fell in a whirling tangle of legs and arms, they chorused in shrill voices:

“It’s Dave!”

Dave was the brother of “The Terrors,” a lithe, clean-cut lad of seventeen, who rode the range with the cowboys, the better to guard his father’s interests.

As the announcement of the twins reached his ears, Mr. Roberts was already on his feet, and he reached the door just as his son pulled his lather-dripping pony to its haunches, threw the reins over its head and leaped from his saddle.

"Another raid by cattle thieves?" asked the owner of the Double Moon.

"Worse than that, Dad. The boys are bringing the cattle in."

"And you let 'em, Dave?" demanded his father, sternly.

"I ordered 'em to."

"You ordered my cattle driven in? Are you crazy?"

"No, sir; it was the only thing to do."

By this time, Mrs. Roberts had joined her husband at the door, and as she heard her son's words she exclaimed:

"For the land's sake, Dave, speak out and tell what it is."

Ere the boy could reply, however, his father shouted: "Bud, run to the corral and saddle 'Brimfire.' With a thousand acres along Deep Creek, the best grazing and watering ground in Wyoming, I'm not going to have my cattle driven home."

"Easy, Dad, easy," interposed Dave. "That's just the trouble. *We can't water the cattle along Deep Creek!* So unless they are driven in they will die of thirst."

"Can't water the cattle in Deep Creek?" repeated the ranchman, as though he could not

believe his ears. “Why not, I should like to know?”

During this colloquy, Dave had been fumbling in the bosom of his cowboy shirt and, as his father finished his question, he drew forth a much-begrimed piece of paper which he offered to his parent as he replied: “That’s why, sir!”

Staring at the paper a moment, the ranchman handed it to his wife, saying, “You read it, Ma; I can’t see without my glasses.” Then, noticing that his younger son had not started for the corral, he shouted, “You, Bud, go get ‘Brimfire.’ ”

It was one of the characteristics of the twins that they realized when they could linger, and when it was necessary to act; and, though loath to leave before the cause of the herd’s return was made known, both Bud and Peggy darted away toward the corral.

Smoothing out the crumpled sheet of paper, Mrs. Roberts read, hesitatingly: “*To whom it may concern: The Ranch Improvement Co., having obtained by warrant of Congress, in Washington assembled, all the water rights along Deep Creek, in Harker County, Wyoming: Be it known: that ranchers, cowboys and others are hereby forbidden to water livestock*

*along Deep Creek, under penalty of the law for trespass, until granted permission by said Ranch Improvement Co. Signed, Honorable Marcus Bement, President of the Ranch Improvement Co., Curtis, Wyoming, May 10, 19—."*

As the weather-tanned ranchman listened to the words which rendered the grazing ground of the Double Moon worthless and seemed to doom his cattle, his horses and his family, as well as those of a half-dozen other ranchmen, to death by thirst, his face grew hard, his gray eyes flashed and his jaws set ominously.

"Where'd you get that—that paper?" he suddenly demanded of Dave.

"Took it from Crooked Sims. Judge Bement sent him out from Curtis yesterday and he's been posting these notices every quarter mile along Deep Creek."

"Well, he won't post any along here!" snapped the owner of the Double Moon. "Ma, hand me my gun."

But Mrs. Roberts did not move. "Now, Pa, don't get excited," she replied. "This here notice is legal; it sounds just like Marcus Bement, and if it's legal, you'll only—"

"Legal!" roared the ranchman. "Is it *legal* to

doom my herds and my family and those of the other ranchmen along Deep Creek to death by thirst? Get my gun. Crooked Sims nor any other hireling of Marcus Bement and his ring won't post any more notices on the Double Moon.”

“That's what he won't, Dad—that is, until he hoofs it back to Curtis and gets a new supply,” exclaimed Dave.

At these words Mr. Roberts looked at his son, his eyes asking the questions which his lips were slow to form.

“Crooked struck our camp last night,” Dave went on. “He showed us one of the notices and offered for five dollars a day to let us water the cattle till he got through posting the creek.

“I took Happy Jack one side and we fixed up a scheme. Jack put the others wise and while Crooked was eating grub we stampeded the cattle.

“When he heard 'em, Crooked ran for his pinto, but Happy rode the pony ahead of the cattle and Crooked saved himself by jumping into the creek.

“After the cattle passed the camp there wasn't enough left of the bag of notices to kindle a fire.

"Then I told the boys to bring home the cattle and rode on ahead to tell you."

At this recital of the temporary balking of Sims and the political ring in Curtis, the ranchman chuckled.

"I reckon you've got a head on your shoulders, son. What's the next move? Got any idea?"

"Yes, sir. I thought we could drive the cattle over to the Barred Circle, Bill Hatch's ranch, while you went to Sturgis and got one of those orders preventing anyone from depriving you of your water rights till the case was tried in court."

"You mean an injunction," said Mr. Roberts.

"Yes, that's it. I couldn't think of the word."

"Reckon that's the thing to do, Dave. But why drive the cattle to the Barred Circle? Lem Mason's Three Star is nearer, and besides, he's our Congressman. Old Bement won't try any funny business with him."

"I thought of that, Dad, but Crooked said Lem was vice-president of the Ranch Improvement Company."

At this announcement Mr. Roberts' expression changed to one of sorrow.

"Poor Lem!" he murmured. "So they've got

him, eh? I told him he didn't have money enough to be Congressman.”

“I don't believe it,” declared Mrs. Roberts emphatically. “Lem Mason wouldn't ruin his friends and neighbors for any amount of money.”

“There are more ways to influence a Congressman than by offering him money, Ma,” returned Mr. Roberts, sorrowfully. “But we've no time to talk and wonder. Dave, you ride over to the Barred Circle and tell Bill I've gone to Sturgis for an injunction. Then get the other ranchers to meet me here this evening. We must hold a council to decide the proper way to protect our rights.”

## CHAPTER II

### POLLY'S DISCOVERY

“**S**TAY close by your mother to-day, you youngsters,” commanded Mr. Roberts as he swung into his saddle, adding hastily, as he noted the looks of protest on the twins’ faces, “she may need you, you know.”

On their way to the corral, “The Terrors” had planned to ride out to meet Happy Jack and the other cowboys, but all feeling of disappointment was lost in the thought that they might be of service in a crisis, and they cheerily chorused:

“All right, Dad.” Then Bud added, with a wink at his sister, “Shall we clean up the bunk-house?”

“Yes, anything, so you don’t go away—and keep out of mischief,” called back the ranchman, as he put spurs to his pony.

“What you want to clean up the bunk-house for?” demanded Peggy of her brother, seizing

him by the arm and drawing him back as he started to follow his mother and Dave into the kitchen. “Don’t you know that’s *work*?”

With a snort of scorn, Bud turned on her:

“Work, huh? Isn’t everything we do work?”

“Maybe, but there’s usually some fun, too.”

“Well, there is to this!”

At this statement, Peggy was silent, as she seemed to run over in her mind the various possibilities of playing tricks on the cowboys, but so often had they been the butts of their jokes that they had come to be over-suspicious. Failing to conceive any plan, she shook her head.

“I can’t think of a thing we haven’t tried, Bud,” she lamented.

“What’s the matter with you this morning?” sneered her brother.

“You must show me, ‘Mr. Smarty.’ Happy Jack and the boys know you and me as well as we do.”

“We’ve never cleaned up the bunk-house before, have we?”

“No; Ma wouldn’t let us.”

“Well, she’s so upset, she won’t think anything to-day.”

“But still, I don’t see—”

“Then listen, stupid. Happy and the others

have been riding all night and it'll be night when they get back from the Three Star, won't it?"

"Yes."

"They'll be plumb tired out, won't they?"

"Yes."

"Then what'll they want to do most?"

"Eat!" returned Peggy with a promptness born of experience.

"They *have* to do that; I said, what will they *want* to do," retorted Bud, determined not to be denied his triumph.

"Smoke," hazarded his sister.

"No; *sleep*, stupid!"

For a moment, Peggy was silent. Then, because from long companionship she was accustomed to Bud's train of thought, she clapped her hands and danced in glee. But her outburst was short lived.

"Stop that—or Ma'll tumble to us," snapped Bud.

"But how'll we get at the tacks to put in the bunks?" whispered Peggy, having divined the trick and realizing the wisdom of her brother's caution. "Ma'd never let us take 'em on *any* excuse."

"We won't ask her. When she comes out to

tell Dave good-by, you sneak to the cupboard and get them.”

“But suppose she sees me, or hears me, or comes in before I get them?” persisted the girl, with the wisdom of experience, knowing it was expedient to be prepared for any miscarriage in their plans.

“She won’t. Trust *me* to keep her from—”

But his words were interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Roberts and Dave, who, refreshed by a hearty breakfast, was ready to start on his mission.

With a wink at his sister, Bud affectionately put his hand through his mother’s arm.

“Come on down to the corral, Ma, and see me rope Dave’s pony for him,” he said, guilelessly. “Which you going to take, Dave?”

“Too bad Black Bess is lame,” lamented his brother. “She’d take me about in good time.”

“She isn’t,” declared Bud, eagerly; then noting the look on his brother’s face, he added hastily, “that is, I don’t *think* she is.”

“What makes you think she isn’t?” demanded Dave.

“She trotted around the corral all right yesterday.”

“Ah, ha! So you’ve been—”

But a sharp nudge from Bud and a significant wink stopped the word on his tongue and with a laugh, Dave said, for he knew the twins had been forbidden to ride the spirited black pony, "Well, I'm right glad she's fit. Now show Ma and me how easily you can rope her."

Bounding away to the corral gate, Bud snatched a lariat from one of the pegs, climbed the gate and, whirling the noose round his head, ran to the bunch of ponies.

At his approach, the horses broke into a gallop, but with cowboy skill, the twin worked the others away from the black he was after. Twice she dodged him, but the third time the noose settled full over her handsome head and, plunging and prancing, he brought her to the gate.

"Clever work, Bud," cried his brother, as he threw on the saddle and tightened the cinches. "I've seen Happy Jack make six casts without landing her."

Good-byes were quickly said, and when Mrs. Roberts returned to the house, Peggy was demurely washing the dishes.

Such docility brought a frown of disapproval from the boy, but, as he had said, his mother was too upset by the news about the water to see anything suspicious in the action, and ere long "The

Terrors” were busily making up the bunks for the returning cowboys, though the making up consisted chiefly in sticking tacks through the bottom blankets.

As Black Bess sped over the rolling plain, Dave’s head was bowed. It was bad enough to have ruin stare them in the face through the rights granted to the Ranch Improvement Company to control the Deep Creek waterway, but it was intolerable to think that Lem Mason, father of the dainty, light-hearted Polly, had had a hand in the business.

Like his mother, when Crooked Sims had told him that Congressman Mason was vice-president of the company, he had refused to believe it. But his father’s words, “There are more ways to influence a Congressman than by offering him money,” kept ringing in his ears, and he found himself wondering what inducement could have been offered to the owner of the Three Star to make him sell out his friends and neighbors.

So engrossed was he in his attempt to solve the problem that he did not see a strong-limbed chestnut ridden by a dainty, dark-haired girl, dressed in khaki, with wisps of hair fluttering under the rakishly tipped sombrero, approaching rapidly; and it was not until a joyous hail, “Oh,

Dave! I'm glad you're the first one I've met," reached his ears that he was made aware of the presence of either rider or horse.

At the sound of the voice, the young fellow trembled. No other voice was there like it and if he had heard it in the jungle forests of Africa he would have recognized it. And as he raised his head, the blood rushed to his cheeks, while into his eyes there crept a look of deep anguish.

"'Lo, Polly," he answered. But he made no motion to check Black Bess.

In amazement, Polly noted the fact.

"Is Bess running away with you?" she cried with alarm. "Can't you check her? I've the best news and want you to be the first to hear it!"

With a half-suppressed groan, Dave drew in his mount and waited. Though the shortest route to the home house of the Barred Circle would have taken him within hailing distance of that of the Three Star, he had purposely made a wide detour—and now he was hailed by the very person he had taken such pains to avoid.

So filled with her happiness was the girl that she did not observe the solemnity of Dave's expression as she rode alongside and exclaimed:

“Oh, Dave! I can go to college! I can go to college! Dad’s made a lot of money in a lucky investment, and so I can go! Aren’t you glad? Just think how I longed to go—and now I can! Why don’t you say something? You used to help me plan how I could go, yet now when I have the chance you sit there like a wooden man—and I thought you’d be so glad. And I kept out of everybody’s way so I wouldn’t tell anyone until I’d a chance to tell you,” she added, more to herself than to the young fellow on the horse beside her.

With her words, Dave had realized the price that had purchased Lem Mason. Well he knew how ardently Polly had longed to go to one of the Eastern colleges, and through his mind there flashed the many meetings they had arranged under the excuse of striving to solve the problem of procuring the necessary money. And as he gazed at the happy girl beside him, he wondered if he, too, being her father, would have accepted or refused the opportunity to gratify her dearest wish when it was presented.

Then the memory of his brother and sister, of his father and mother, of the ruin that threatened them, swept to his mind and his face grew hard.

Glancing at him in amazement at his silence, Polly was startled by his expression.

With a quick movement of sympathy, she rested her fingers on his bridle arm.

"Tell me, Dave, what is it? What has happened? I didn't know. I didn't stop to think, I was so full of my own happiness. What is it?"

And as she looked up into his face there was infinite sympathy in her eyes.

With an effort, Dave pulled himself together.

"Oh, it's nothing—that is, nothing to you," he blurted.

"Nothing—to—me," repeated Polly slowly. "Who is it to—you?"

"Yes—and to everyone else along Deep Creek but the Three Star."

With eyes big with surprise, Polly added:

"How can the Three Star be unaffected by anything that concerns all the other Deep Creek ranches?"

The conflict of his emotions was too great for the seventeen-year old boy. He thought of the ruin of his family for the benefit of the girl with whom he had grown up, and he blurted, brutally:

"Because the owner of the Three Star is the

vice-president of the Ranch Improvement Company!”

In injured bewilderment, the girl drew back.

“Why, that’s the company Dad invested in and made the money for me to go to college,” she exclaimed.

“Exactly.”

“But how can that affect the ranches?” Polly pursued, in perplexity.

“Not a bit, of course. It merely takes our water away from all of us. That won’t affect us or our cattle. Oh, no!”

“Dave!” murmured the girl, stung by the bitterness in his tone. “Dave, don’t—please. There must be some mistake—there *is* some mistake. Dad would never sell out his neighbours.”

“That’s what we all said—until we, that is, I—learned his price.”

“Sell out? His price? How dare you use such words about my father, Dave Roberts? What do you mean? Either you’ll apologize or I’ll—I’ll—”

The aspersions upon her father’s honour had sent the blood from Polly’s face, leaving it as near white as her tan would permit, while her eyes glowed defiantly, but she choked over the last words and burst into violent sobs.

"Oh, goodness, Polly, don't do that!" groaned the lad. "There's no need to cry—you're all right."

"I'm—I'm not if you—if the others—aren't all right, and you know it, Dave. Oh, tell me, Dave, please. I felt things weren't all right when I saw Dad last week, but he said they were. Tell me, Dave, just what has happened—please."

With an effort, the boy obeyed, relating all he knew.

"And you think it was so that I could go to college that Dad has done this?" questioned Polly, her voice but a whisper.

"I didn't say so!"

"But you *think* it?"

Dave was silent.

As her eyes read his face, Polly reeled in her saddle.

"Oh, my poor Dad! My poor Dad!" she breathed, then wheeled her horse, struck the amazed animal with her quirt and dashed away toward the Three Star home house.

## CHAPTER III

### TEMPORARY RELIEF

**H**AD Deep Creek been in the East, it would have been called a river. Rising in that spur of the high lands known as the Wind River Mountains, it flowed eastward through a fertile valley varying in width from ten to fifteen miles, and was some thirty miles in length.

Thither, in the early eighties, Samuel Roberts had brought his bride and purchased a thousand acres of the best grazing land near the eastern end of the valley. Following him had come Lemuel Mason, Bill Hatch, Lon Jenkins, Sandy McCord and Thomas White, taking up ranches in the order named.

For the reason that the Double Moon was nearest to the town of Curtis, whence the emissary of the Ranch Improvement Company had been sent to post the notices, none of the other ranchmen had an inkling of the ruin that faced them.

Varied and emphatic, therefore, were the comments with which Dave's information was greeted, and when the boy returned to his home ranch, he was accompanied by all five of the other proprietors and half a dozen cowboys who were to act as messengers when definite plans for protecting their water rights had been formulated.

Several of the ranchmen were for preventing the posting of the notices by force, but Mrs. Roberts and Dave argued against it, declaring that such high-handed methods would prove of more harm than good when the matter was taken into court, and their wise counsel, while not convincing the enraged cattlemen, held them in check.

As twilight fell, the men grew more and more impatient at the failure of Mr. Roberts to return and they were discussing the advisability of setting out to find him, in the thought that he might have met with foul play, when "The Terrors" raced up on their ponies.

"Dad's coming! Dad's coming!" they chorused.

Excitedly the others crowded around them.

"Where is he?" demanded Hatch.

"About five miles back," returned Bud.

“Did he get the injunction?” asked Dave.

“Yes—that is, for the Double Moon and—”

“That’s why we rode ahead,” interrupted Peggy. “Dad said the rest of you were to drive your cattle to the Double Moon right quick.”

“Then he didn’t get an injunction for all of us?” demanded McCord.

“He said he did the best he could but you were to hurry and get the cattle to the Double Moon,” returned Bud.

“Looks like we were being double-crossed all round,” growled McCord. “If Sam could get an injunction for himself, why couldn’t he for the rest of us?”

“Dad said he did the best he could,” flared Peggy, angrily facing the Scotchman who cast aspersions on her father.

“And if Old Honesty said that, you can be sure it’s true!” declared Hatch, emphatically. “If he says drive the cattle to the Double Moon in a hurry, I’m going to get mine started as soon as possible. We can hear Sam’s reasons later. Hey, you Shorty, ride to the Barred Circle like the old Harry was after you and tell the boys to hurry my cattle this way.”

Quickly the messenger vaulted into his saddle and sped away on his errand.

Following Hatch's lead, the other ranchmen despatched their cowboys with similar instructions, even the complaining McCord deeming it wiser to act first and talk afterwards; and as the last of the messengers disappeared in the distance, the owner of the Double Moon came in sight and in due time reached the excited group of cattle owners.

"Why didn't you get an injunction for the Cross and Circle as well as for the Double Moon?" growled McCord, striding toward the owner of the latter.

"Easy, Sandy, easy," returned Roberts as he handed his rein to Dave.

"None of your blarney, Sam; I want a straight answer," snapped the Scotchman.

"Because I couldn't, Sandy. When you want an injunction, you've got to apply in person or through a properly certified agent."

"Well, weren't you acting for us?" demanded McCord.

"Yes; and I'd have received injunctions for all of us if it hadn't been for Marcus Bement."

At the name of the man who was at the bottom of their trouble, the ranch owners gave voice to vigorous exclamations, overwhelming Roberts with questions.

Raising his hands in protest, the owner of the Double Moon said:

“It’s quite a story—and I’m sure hungry. Let’s eat first and then I’ll tell you.”

“What’s the use of wasting time over grub? If we’ve got to act for ourselves, the sooner you tell us what to do the sooner we’ll get it done,” declared the owner of the Cross and Circle.

In surprise, Roberts looked at the ranchman and then toward the twins.

“Didn’t Bud and Peggy tell you to send for your cattle?” he asked.

“Sure. And so we have. But it’s about how to get injunctions for ourselves, I mean,” asserted McCord.

“It’s too late!”

“Why?” chorused the others.

“Because no sooner did old Bement learn what I was up to than he sent a dozen men to post the notices. I saw them all the way back from Sturgis.”

Again the ranchmen expressed their opinions of Marcus Bement in no uncertain terms and, taking advantage of the momentary cessation of the questions, the owner of the Double Moon led the way into the house, where his good wife was

placing an appetizing supper on the long table.

Despite their impatience to hear in detail about Roberts' experiences at Sturgis, so delicious was the food set before them, it was not until their hearty appetites had been satisfied that they broached the subject.

Then, as they ranged themselves about the doorstep to smoke, Hatch said:

"Now, Old Honesty, begin at the beginning and don't leave anything out."

In compliance, the owner of the Double Moon set himself comfortably and began:

"When I got to Sturgis, I went straight to Judge Hand's office, but he was at court, so I went there.

"He was hearing some trifling case and I reckon I acted sort of impatient, for the Judge called me to the bench and asked what the trouble was. I told him and, after adjourning court, he took me back to his office.

"I explained things and he set to work making out the injunction papers for the six of us—of course, I didn't ask for one for Lem.

"That took considerable time. Then, because he was my lawyer, Hand couldn't act as judge

too, and we were obliged to go before Judge Howe.”

“Why, he’s Marcus Bement’s ‘handy man Friday,’ ” interrupted Hatch.

“Just so,” commented Roberts. “But being the only other judge in Sturgis, we couldn’t go to anyone else.

“Well, when we went into his court, there was old Bement sitting at the lawyer’s table. Soon as he laid eyes on me, he must have sensed things, for up he jumped and whispered to Howe.

“Without giving Hand a chance to speak, Howe says, ‘Sorry, Judge, but this case’ll take all the afternoon and I can’t hear you.’

“ ‘Oh, yes you can,’ said Hand, and then he whispered something I couldn’t catch. Anyhow, Howe went white and then asked the lawyers who were trying the case before him if they were willing to take a short recess. Being friends of Hand, they agreed, though they all hung round to learn what caused the interruption.

“Then Hand stated the business and asked for the injunctions. Howe took the papers, looked them over and made ready to sign them when Bement speaks up.

“ ‘You can grant an injunction only to Sam Roberts,’ he says.

“‘But Mr. Roberts is the agent for the other ranch owners,’ said Hand.

“Howe hemmed and hawed and then said, ‘I reckon Judge Hand’s right, Marcus.’

“‘But he ain’t,’ snapped Bement. ‘Where’s Sam’s writing to show he’s agent for the rest?’

“That was a poser. But Hand said as how the case meant life or death to thousands of cattle and perhaps scores of people and that it was no time to quibble.

“But old Bement wouldn’t give in and so I could only get an injunction preventing the Ranch Improvement Company and its agents from posting the notices on the Double Moon ranch for seven days.”

During this recital, the other ranchers had commented freely, but as they heard the announcement of the limit they were amazed into silence.

“Why for only seven days?” inquired Dave.

“Because Howe would only grant what they call a ‘temporary’ injunction, and when the time is up, both sides must appear in court. After the case is stated and argued, the judge will decide whether or not to make the injunction permanent—and it’s going to be some hard to beat Bement and his crowd,” concluded Roberts.

“And if we lose?” suggested McCord after a lengthy silence.

“We can’t lose!” growled Hatch.

“Don’t be too sure,” commented the owner of the Double Moon. “I don’t think Bement can put the screws on Howe strong enough to make him refuse to give me a permanent injunction, but so’s to make sure, Dave and I are going to Washington with Judge Hand to lay the matter before the President—and I want you all to contribute towards the expenses.”

Whistles of amazement greeted this announcement, while Dave danced about in wild delight.

“Hooray! I’m going to Washington to see the President!” he shouted.

“A lot of good that’ll do,” growled McCord. “What do you suppose the President of the United States cares about a few ranchers in Wyoming? *My* advice is to use the money to buy cartridges and rifles, arm all the cow-punchers we have and stop every man who tries to post a notice along Deep Creek with a lead injunction. That won’t be any seven-day affair and it won’t take long to make people realize it’s so unhealthy an occupation to post notices that the Ranch Improvement Company won’t be able to hire anybody to do it.”

This desperate, lawless proposition met with murmurs of approval, but only for the moment.

“Every man belonging to the ranches on Deep Creek would be in jail within twenty-four hours after the patrol was established,” declared Dave’s father. “We’ve got to act carefully.”

“And let them take our land and cattle as well as our water, I suppose,” sneered the owner of the Cross and Circle.

“Now, Sandy, be reasonable,” urged Mr. Roberts. “Whatever is done, we must keep within the law. Now, don’t interrupt. Judge Hand said that Bement would try his best to make us do something against the law, and if we did he would not only have us arrested, but would use the fact so it would prejudice our case and give Howe the opening for not making my injunction permanent.”

Another silence greeted this advice, as the ranch owners absorbed its wisdom.

“I reckon that’s sure enough good sense,” reluctantly admitted White, at last. “But it seems hard not to be able to protect your own property.”

“Not so hard as being put in jail,” returned Old Honesty. “And besides, Deep Creek isn’t our property.”

“Not our property? What do you mean?” demanded McCord.

“Judge Hand said all we had in Deep Creek was water rights. It isn’t like cattle or horses or houses, and it isn’t as though Deep Creek was a pond or lake situated in the land belonging to one of us. Rivers and creeks and such are under the control of the United States Government.”

“Well, it’s too almighty complicated for me, but if Judge Hand says so and Old Honesty backs up the Judge, I’m for following their advice,” declared the owner of the Barred Circle, slapping his knee emphatically. “How much do you want us to chip in, Sam?”

“That’s the way to talk, Bill,” returned Mr. Roberts. “I should think a hundred dollars apiece would be all right. Of course, I’ll pay my share and for Dave, but the Judge said we’d better have something extra for fees and such, in case of emergency.

“With all your cattle and boys on the Double Moon, I want you men to stay here. Don’t let anybody post my ranch. All you’ve got to do is to show ’em this paper.” And he produced the precious injunction.

McCord protested against leaving his ranch

house to the mercy of possible thieves, but Mr. Roberts told him Bement would be careful, on his part, not to allow any depredations, and the rest of the evening was passed in planning for and discussing possible emergencies.

Hatch's messengers having intercepted Happy Jack and the members of the Double Moon outfit, they headed the herd for the home ranch, arriving after midnight.

The cattle, as well as themselves, being tired from the forced drive, the cowboys lost no time in getting to their bunk-house.

But no sooner had they prepared to sleep than there were yells that would have put a band of Apache Indians to the blush.

"We're attacked!" shouted McCord, springing from his bunk.

While the other ranchmen were tumbling out and hunting for their shooting irons, Dave ran to the bunk-house, learned in picturesque language about the tack-strewn bunks and returned to his father just as he was leading his fellow owners to the charge.

"Bud and Peggy did a little decorating," he chuckled.

## CHAPTER IV

### DAVE SAVES THE DAY

**T**HE dazzling brilliance of the lights, the splendid width and the massive buildings lining Pennsylvania Avenue caused Dave to stop in wide-mouthed admiration as Judge Hand and his father led him forth from the magnificent railroad station in Washington.

Never before had the boy been in a large city at night and the gorgeousness of the spectacle dumbfounded him.

“Why, it’s just like fairyland!” he exclaimed delightedly. “I never saw anything so wonderful.”

Indulgent his elders allowed him to watch the kaleidoscope of motor cars, electrics, carriages and people; but when he had stood for five minutes as though rooted to the spot, the Judge took his arm.

“There are other things to see, Dave,” he said with a smile. “We’ll get in a taxicab and ride to the hotel.”

“Is it far?” asked the boy.

“No, only a few blocks.”

“Then I’d rather walk—if you and Dad don’t mind. I can see more walking.”

Again his elders humoured him and they started up the broad throughfare, but so eager was the young Westerner to look in every shop window, while at the same time trying to see all that happened on the avenue, that at last the Judge again took him by the arm.

“We shan’t reach the hotel until to-morrow if you don’t strike a faster gait, Dave,” he said, laughingly. “You’ll have plenty of time for sight-seeing to-morrow and the next day.”

“But it’s all so wonderful to me, sir,” returned the lad, fresh from the citiless valley of Deep Creek, where the only night lights were the myriads of stars. “All during the journey here I tried to picture what Washington would be like, but I never imagined anything like this.”

In due course they reached the hotel and again Dave stared about him in delight at the gorgeous lobby alive with richly-gowned and handsome women and imposing-looking men, while the Judge registered for the party.

Dinner was an epoch for the boy and though he was ravenously hungry he could scarcely eat a

mouthful, so absorbed was he in watching the people about him.

They had reached the capital in the early evening, and when the repast was finished, Judge Hand said:

“Should you like to go to the theatre, Dave?”

“I sure reckon I would,” returned the boy, his eyes flashing with delight.

“Then I’ll walk round with you and your father and leave you.”

The thought of being left alone appalled the two simple men of the plains and they protested.

“Oh, I’ll be waiting for you here at the entrance when the performance is over. But it is necessary for me to see two or three of my friends to make arrangements for our interview with the President.”

Dave’s dread at losing the companionship and guardianship of the Judge was soon forgotten in his interest in watching all that went on about him. And his father was only a whit less keen than himself, for although he had been in cities before he had never been to the theatre.

The play was a merry musical comedy, full of “catchy” music and pretty scenes, and the two plainsmen enjoyed every minute of it, utterly

unconscious of the amusement their actions and comments afforded those seated near them.

Long did Dave lie awake that night re-living the scenes through which he had passed, as though afraid when he awoke his being in Washington would all prove a dream and he would look out upon the green valley of Deep Creek.

"Come, Dave, you've got to hurry to get breakfast before it is time for us to go to the White House," said Judge Hand, shaking the sleeping boy smartly.

In a twinkling Dave was out of bed.

"How long have you been up, Judge?" he asked.

"About three hours."

"And you let me sleep?" said Dave, reproachfully.

"Oh, you haven't missed anything," laughed the Judge. "Washington isn't really awake until noon."

"We're truly going to see the President?" asked the boy as their taxicab turned into the driveway leading to the Executive offices.

"Not only to see him but to *talk* to him," replied Judge Hand. "That is, all but your father. He has such a cold he can't speak out loud."

“Oh, my! Just think of it! I’m going to talk to the man who rules the greatest country in the world,” exclaimed Dave, delightedly. Then he suddenly grew serious. “How do I address him, if he speaks to me?”

“Just call him Mr. President.”

“Do I shake hands with him?”

“If he offers to.”

Further instruction was rendered impossible by their arrival at the Executive offices where, in one of the reception rooms, they were quickly joined by a thin little man whom the Judge introduced as Senator Hawk.

“Glad you’re so punctual, Hand,” smiled the Senator. “I think the President will see us right away.” And beckoning an attendant, he wrote something on one of his cards and gave it to him.

“You are to bring the gentlemen right in, Senator Hawk,” said the attendant, returning.

With boyish pride, Dave noted the looks of surprised curiosity with which others in the reception room, less influentially befriended, watched them. Then he was conscious of passing through a large room filled with desks, clerks and the rattling of typewriters and finally of seeing a massive door opened, when he beheld a

stern though kindly-faced man sitting at a wide table.

“Mr. President, allow me to present Judge Hand, Samuel Roberts, known through the length and breadth of Wyoming as ‘Old Honesty,’ and Mr. Dave Roberts,” said Senator Hawk.

In turn, the Chief Executive shook each man cordially by the hand, exclaiming, as he grasped the boy’s:

“Young Honesty?”

“I hope so, Mr. President,” stammered Dave, blushing furiously.

But the busy man of affairs seemed not to hear him, for he turned to Judge Hand and asked:

“What do you wish me to do for you, Judge?”

“Justice, Mr. President.”

The directness of the answer seemed to amaze the President, for he glanced inquiringly at Senator Hawk.

“I will vouch for Hand and anyone he brings with him,” quickly asserted the Senator.

“Proceed, Judge,” remarked the President. “Won’t you be seated, gentlemen?”

Even as they took chairs, the man of law said:

“Mr. President, Mr. Roberts and I represent

six ranch owners of Deep Creek Valley, Harker County, Wyoming. These men own some fifty thousand head of cattle and represent an investment of some twenty million dollars.

“Within a few days, a bill has been passed by Congress and signed by you giving to the Ranch Improvement Company the power to control the water of Deep Creek. The—”

“Just a moment, please,” interrupted the Chief Executive, as he pressed a button, saying to the clerk who responded, “Bring me the memoranda on the Ranch Improvement Company, of—”

“Curtis, Harker County,” quickly supplied Judge Hand.

“Of Curtis, Harker County, Wyoming,” continued the President. “Proceed, Judge.”

“The company immediately began to exercise its newly granted powers by posting notices forbidding the ranch owners along Deep Creek to use a drop of the water, thus dooming their cattle, their horses and themselves to possible death from thirst.

“By quick work, we have obtained a temporary injunction for Mr. Roberts. Two days remain before the date set for the arguments to determine whether the injunction shall be made per-

manent or denied. I ask you, Mr. President, to grant relief to the ranch owners of Deep Creek."

Before the man of law had finished his plea, the clerk had returned with the desired papers, which the Chief Executive was glancing at carefully.

"Your statement, Judge, is at variance with the facts as stated in my memoranda. Are you sure you are telling me the truth?"

At these words the three men from Deep Creek Valley sprang to their feet, the two Roberts flushing as red as the Judge.

Keenly the President scrutinized them, then said:

"My words may seem hard. I am accustomed to have glib-tongued men try to make me believe black is white. Suppose you let me talk with Mr. Roberts."

"Unfortunately, Mr. President, he has such a cold that he cannot speak aloud," explained Judge Hand.

Again the Chief Magistrate shot the three men before him a piercing glance.

"I will talk with the boy. That will probably be still better."

As Dave heard these words and sensed the fact that the cause of his father and the other ranch-

men rested upon him, he flushed deeply and then went white, while he clenched his hands as though the better to nerve himself for the ordeal.

“Dave, just listen to me,” began the President. “How many ranches are there in Deep Creek Valley?”

“Seven.”

“You see?” exclaimed the Chief Magistrate, turning to Senator Hawk. “Judge Hand said he represented *the six* ranch owners.”

“Mr. President, Judge Hand does represent the six. Congressman Lem Mason is the seventh, and he is the vice-president of the Ranch Improvement Company,” said Dave in a quiet voice, all fright having left him as he forgot himself in his earnestness.

“Then if your Congressman, one of your neighbours, believes in the company enough to become actively identified with it, that would seem to be sufficient evidence it will not cause the ruin or loss Judge Hand stated.”

Dave noted the looks of dismay settling on the faces of the Judge and his father and of anger on the Senator’s, and he threw back his head as though the better to meet the crisis.

“You are wrong, Mr. President,” he stoutly asserted, and before anyone could interrupt, he

added: "Lem Mason never worked for or voted for that bill because he believed in it."

In amazement, the men stared at the stripling before them.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the President.

"I mean, Mr. President, that his support was bought."

If the boy's auditors were startled by the first statement they were dumbfounded by this second.

"Do you realize what you are saying?" asked the Chief Executive, sternly.

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Then why do you say so?"

"Because I know the price."

"Name it!" commanded the head of the nation, with a terseness that brought the others to the edge of their chairs.

"Will it be made public?" queried Dave.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because such a course will bring added disgrace to an innocent person."

So tense was the silence as the President scrutinized the boy who was fencing so fearlessly with him that the spectators scarcely dared breathe.

“Suppose I say it will not be made public?” finally commented the Chief Magistrate.

“Then I will tell.”

“And if I say it will be?”

“Then I must refuse, Mr. President.”

“Even to the prejudice of your father and his fellow ranchers?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

Many were the dramatic scenes Senator Hawk had witnessed as they were enacted in the President’s private office, but never had he beheld a mere boy making terms with the nation’s ruler over information that others would gladly have shouted from the housetops—and making them despite the fact that failure meant ruin to his father and friends. Clever reader of human nature, the President realized that the lad facing him was no ordinary youth and he did not keep the admiration he felt for his courage from showing in his voice as he said:

“Gentlemen, I trust to your honour that the revelations about to be made to us will never be breathed by you. What was Congressman Mason’s price, Dave?”

“The money to send his daughter Polly to a college in the East—money for which she and I had worked and prayed, Mr. President.”

At the words, the Chief Executive half rose from his chair, then dropped back, turned his head and looked out the window, the while he thrummed on the arms of his chair.

When at last he spoke, there was a different timbre in his voice.

“Are you sure of this, Dave?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“How?”

“I’d rather not tell, Mr. President.”

“It involves—er—the Congressman’s daughter, I suppose?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“But you are positive?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

“I think I’ll take your word for it, Dave,” returned the Chief Magistrate, slowly, casting a hasty glance at the Senator. Then looking at the papers again, he said, “But the members of the company declare it is their purpose to establish irrigation ditches to the south, which will make fertile thousands of acres now barren. If that be the case, you six men seem to be asking me to help you to prevent scores of other ranchers and thousands of cattle and horses from obtaining good grazing grounds.”

“But, Mr. President, it is impossible to run

irrigation ditches south from Deep Creek,” exclaimed Dave.

“Why?”

“Because you can’t make water flow up hill!”

“Good boy, Dave!” cried Judge Hand, entirely forgetting where he was, until a suggestive cough reminded him. “Beg pardon, Mr. President,” he smiled. “Recourse to maps will show you a range of hills on the southern side of Deep Creek Valley. So, you see, the Ranch Improvement Company is not the well-meaning corporation it professes to be.”

At this unexpected turn to the matter, the face of the Chief Executive grew stern and angry.

“I’ve been deceived! I’ve been grossly deceived,” he exclaimed. “Gentlemen, please leave me now. You will hear from me this afternoon.”

## CHAPTER V

### OLD HONESTY MAKES A PROMISE

**I**NCENSED at the manner in which his credulity had been imposed upon by the sponsors of the Ranch Improvement Company, the door had scarcely closed upon the three emissaries from Deep Creek Valley than the Chief Magistrate was setting in motion the far-reaching machinery of his office that he might get at the bottom of the matter. Senators and Congressmen were summoned to the Executive offices, and lengthy telegrams were despatched to trusted agents in Wyoming.

But in less than two hours, the President discovered that what seemed but a simple matter was, in reality, a veritable mare's nest!

He learned that the officers of the Ranch Improvement Company, regardless of what their own personal ideas might be, were, in truth, but the pawns of a tremendously powerful coterie of capitalists who were acquiring the water-

rights and every possible acre of land in the Cis-Rocky Mountain region.

Throughout the early afternoon, many Senators and Congressmen entered the private office of the Chief Executive with happy countenances, only to emerge later—the length of time varying with the experience and influence of each member—with faces betokening the gravest concern and anxiety.

As the last of these callers was dismissed, one of the principal members of the moneyed coterie arrived and sent in his card, hitherto an open sesame.

But to his surprise, he was allowed to cool his heels in the reception room for a good twenty minutes. Having learned, by that mysterious underground manner by which news of grave crises is communicated, that there was trouble over the Ranch Improvement Company, the man of money had hastened to the Executive offices that he might give the matter its quietus with a few reassuring words.

As minute after minute found him still in the reception room, however, his manner of buoyant confidence forsook him and his face showed traces of keen apprehension.

And this feeling was no whit lessened when,

being finally admitted to the President's private office, he was greeted with a curt "Be seated!" in place of the usual cordial salutation.

Deeply wrought up over his discoveries, the Chief Executive cast his customary urbanity to the winds.

"Why didn't you tell me what you and your confrères were up to out West?" he demanded.

Taken aback by such directness, the capitalist strove for time to gather his wits by asking:

"What do you mean, Mr. President?"

"You know well enough what I mean. Brief investigation has disclosed four bills giving men who are but figureheads for you and your associates valuable water rights—to be plain, the control of water which is needed for men, women and children, horses and cattle. I was told these were beneficent measures that would change thousands of acres from barrenness to fertility."

"So they will."

"Provided you can make water flow up hill!" retorted the President, using Dave's phrase.

"What do you mean?" asked the man of money, this time in deadly earnest.

"I mean that in one bill the purpose is stated to be to build irrigation ditches to the south—

and it happens that there is a range of mountains to the south of your waterway!”

“Stupid duffers—that’s merely a slip of the men who drew the bill, Mr. President.”

“Slip, or a deliberate attempt to deceive me and make me believe the bill would benefit the people, it has served to open my eyes, sir, and in looking over the three other bills, I have come across things that have made me suspect—”

Determined to change the subject and turn it to one in which he would not be on the defensive, the man of money exclaimed:

“Who started this mess?”

“A man they call ‘Old Honesty.’”

“I’ll get him!”

For the first time in many hours, the eyes of the Chief Magistrate lighted, as he commented:

“I hope things will be so that I can watch the meeting!”

Angered by this thrust, the capitalist snapped:

“Look here, Mr. President, do you realize that there is an election for President of the United States to be held soon and that you are not only quarrelling with the best friends you have between the Mississippi and the Rockies, but the men who can swing into line at least three States now considered doubtful?”

At these words, suggestive of so sinistre a threat, the Chief Executive's face went livid.

"These are matters of right and justice—not politics, sir!"

"Right and buncombe! Either you will leave our bills alone, or I will use every bit of influence my associates and I can muster against you."

Ere this extraordinary utterance was finished, the President pressed a button.

"Ask the newspapermen to come in," he said to the clerk who answered the summons.

At the mention of the men whom corruptionists most dread, the man of money went deathly white. Before his mind there flashed glaring headlines giving in detail the bills obtained by his pawns and the statement of the Chief Magistrate as to the manner in which he had been deceived, the facts in regard to the mountains southward of Deep Creek and, finally, the threat to turn votes against him—and he shuddered. And he was too clever a gauger of human nature not to know that such a statement would not only cause himself and associates severe financial losses, but would make thousands of friends for the man who defied his threats.

"Not that, Mr. President! I was—er—only

joking. If you took me seriously, I not only beg your pardon but apologize,” exclaimed the capitalist.

“Very well, Jenkins, you need not call the newspapermen. Instead, please send to the Balmoral for Dave Roberts, his father and Judge Hand.” And as the clerk went to execute the order, the President turned to the capitalist. “I have not decided what I shall do in regard to my recent discoveries. I will say, though, that it will not make your case look so—er—awkward, if I hear that Samuel Roberts receives a permanent injunction.”

“Thank you, Mr. President. I will go right out and wire our agent not to offer any objections when the case comes up.”

When the trio from Deep Creek Valley again entered the President’s private office, they were shocked at the change in his appearance. His eyes were lustreless and his face was lined as with deep worry.

With a wan smile he greeted them.

“It does me good to see your honest faces again—and to know that you *are* honest,” he said in a voice that sounded very tired. “I wish the country held more men like you—life wouldn’t seem quite so hopeless, at times.

"I won't keep you long—but there are one or two things I want to say.

"Dave, you and your father have rendered *me* a great service by bringing the Deep Creek matter to my attention, in just what way I shall not now explain.

"I have so arranged that a permanent injunction will be granted you, Old Honesty. I like to speak that nickname.

"It may seem to you that I should have obtained permanent injunctions for your friends, also. But there is such a thing as expediency. A man in my position is compelled constantly to resort to it. I have, with your help, uncovered a nest of vipers. Rather than rouse them instantly, it is expedient so to arrange matters that at one blow we may crush them all.

"Old Honesty, I want you to deliver that blow! I want you to run for Congress from Wyoming. I'll see to it that Mason resigns. Only by filling the House of Representatives and the Senate with men like you can we hope to curtail the ravages of the special interests. Will you run?"

"If you want me to, Mr. President," Dave's father managed to say.

"Good! Let your platform be publicity in all public affairs and direct primaries that the

people, and not corrupt political rings, may choose the men who shall represent them.

“Dave, you can stump the district for your father. If you talk as straight as you did to me, you’ll make votes for him. When you get ready to marry Polly, please remember to send me a wedding invitation.

“And now, good-bye, gentlemen. I shall keep close tabs on you and Dave during your campaign, Old Honesty. Don’t announce it too soon. It’s half the fight to catch the other fellows unprepared.”

And as the happy trio filed from the private office, the President’s head sank upon his breast.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE INTERVIEW THAT FAILED

**T**HOUGH Dave and Judge Hand were in the highest spirits as they whirled back to the Balmoral after their remarkable interview, Old Honesty was as solemn as the proverbial owl.

“What’s the matter, Sam? You’re going to get your permanent injunction and you’ve opened the President’s eyes to the worst land- and water-grabbing syndicate in the country. And yet you look as though you’d lost your last friend,” rallied the Judge.

“But think what I’ve got myself into—and with my eyes wide open, at that,” bemoaned the owner of the Double Moon.

“What you’ve got yourself into; what do you mean?” asked the man of law, puzzled by his client’s words.

“Didn’t I promise I’d run for Congressman from our district?”

“To be sure. What’s that to do with it?”

“Isn’t that enough?” groaned the ranchman.

At the words, Judge Hand sank back in the cab and laughed heartily.

“Why, man, you’re as good as elected,” he finally said.

“It may strike you as a joke but it doesn’t me,” retorted Old Honesty. “I don’t know any more about politics than an unbranded calf.”

“All the better for you—that’s probably why the President asked you to run. You won’t be drawn into any questionable deals.”

“He oughtn’t to have asked me.”

At the words, Judge Hand leaned forward and seized the ranchman’s arm.

“Look here, Sam,” he said, “I don’t know what you’re driving at—and I don’t care. I just want you to listen to me.

“The President said he wanted as many ‘clean’ men as he could get in Congress—and you’re the ‘cleanest’ man I know in Wyoming. Now—”

“That’s just the trouble, Judge,” interrupted Old Honesty. “All the politicians I know are trickier than a man-killing broncho. I’m not onto the game, so I can’t win. Yet, knowing that, I promised to run. That’s the trouble. I said I’d run, and I can’t win.”

“Can’t win? Nonsense! With your record

and the President's support, you can beat any man in Wyoming!"

"But I haven't got the President's support—if I had, I'd feel different."

As though he thought the man beside him were daft, the Judge looked at him.

"Sam," he said, "if I didn't know you, I don't know what I'd think. Didn't the President say he'd keep his eye on you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's his way of saying he'll do what he can for you."

"Do you really mean that, Hand?" asked the ranchman, looking into the Judge's face earnestly.

"Never meant anything more in my life, Sam."

A sigh of profound relief was Old Honesty's only answer, but the look of anxiety vanished from his face.

As the trio entered the hotel lobby, a score of newspapermen surrounded them. Always watching the Executive offices and White House for signs that might work up into stories big with importance to the millions who are influenced by the public press, it required but an instant for the correspondents on duty to realize

that the summoning of so many representatives and senators to the Executive offices betokened something of moment. And it took but another instant for them to learn that the three ungainly men, so redolent of the West, were the cause of that something. But to their amazement they found that their usual sources of information were closed to them.

As a newspaperman's interest and determination grow in direct ratio with the difficulties encountered in obtaining the story—the newspaper name for all subjects which are to be written up—the correspondents were on edge when the trio entered the hotel and, blocking their progress, deluged them with questions.

With a smile, Judge Hand declared there was nothing to say for publication, that they were simply three Westerners who had been enabled to pay their respects to the nation's head through the influence of one of their friends.

Accustomed to such denials, the newspapermen were only the more convinced that there was a big story behind the interview of these Westerners, but from experience they realized the futility of trying to question Judge Hand and, as though accepting his statement, they made way for him and the ranchman to pass.

But no sooner had the two men done so than the correspondents closed in again around Dave, in the evident belief that his inexperience would enable them to worm the story out of him.

Thinking only of getting the walls of the rooms between them and the insistent news gatherers as soon as possible, Judge Hand had led the ranchman into the elevator and given the word to start before he noticed that Dave was not with them.

Quickly he ordered the elevator man to descend, and as he reached the lobby, he groaned at the sight that met his eyes. But as he reached the group of keen-faced men, many of whom were members of Congress, surrounding Dave, he stopped abruptly.

Eyes flashing and face flushed, the boy was speaking.

"I'm green as to city ways, but where I come from there's one custom that's only broken when a fellow's looking for a fight—we don't ask questions," he said, looking at his tormentors.

With a chuckle, the Judge started toward Dave, when he felt a restraining hand on his arm and turning, he saw Senator Hawk.

"I knew 'the boys' would be after you, so I came over," he whispered.

“Then why didn’t you get Dave away from them?” snapped the Judge.

“So I should have if he hadn’t proved a match for the best of them. Just listen a minute—it’s rich.”

“As you admit being unfamiliar with city ways,” began one of the newspapermen, “I’ll tell you it’s one of *our* customs to answer questions civilly. Now you’ve been to call on the President. Everything he does and says, everybody he sees, is of interest to all the people in this country and many abroad. But he’s a busy man and so you would be conferring a favour on him by telling us what he said and why you called on him.”

Pausing for a moment in the hope that his words might cause his victim to speak, but finding they did not, the newspaperman went on:

“Don’t you see, you’ll be saving him a lot of bother by telling us all about your interview instead of obliging us to ask him.”

“That’s queer,” drawled Dave. “The President struck me as a man who would prefer to speak for himself, when he had anything to say.”

A ripple of amusement, punctuated by exclamations of “Good boy!” came from the onlookers at this retort.

At a loss as to their next move, the reporters were silent a moment, and taking advantage of the fact, the boy started to get away from them.

Instantly the newspapermen closed in tighter.

"Look here, I've tried to be decent to you fellows," said Dave, his face growing white. "I may look 'easy' but I know that if the President wanted to say anything about our interview he'd say it. Anyhow, you won't get anything out of me. And now I'm going to my room, understand?"

But the newspapermen never budged.

So quick was the action, none of the spectators could see just what happened, but a couple of the correspondents seemed to spin round like tops, and Dave, with hands clenched and face white, dashed for the elevator.

Instantly Judge Hand was by his side, while Senator Hawk approached the newspapermen.

"New experience for you boys interviewing a red-blooded Westerner, isn't it?" he smiled. Then he grew serious. "I'm surprised at you. If my young friend hadn't been a match for you, I should have taken a hand long ago. But I want to tell you this, if I hear of any of you bothering him again there will be some changes among the correspondents at Washington. My

friends and I know the owners of your papers, and your insults to this boy won't sound well when repeated.” Then, resuming his smile, he added, “I'll give you a tip. This story will break, as you boys call it, I believe, in Wyoming, not in Washington.”

And turning on his heel, the Senator hastened after the Judge and Dave and rode up in the elevator with them, while the discomfited newspapermen hurried away to send out the tip given by Senator Hawk. But they carried away with them a respect for the seventeen-year-old boy; and either in the evening or the next morning had each and severally made peace with him. Later they vied with one another in giving him a good time by taking him about the city. But never was there so much as an allusion to Dave's interview with the man in the White House.

## CHAPTER VII

### LEM MASON'S REWARD

**W**HEN the Senator said that the story of the cause and result of the visit of the three men from Deep Creek at the Executive offices would come first from Wyoming, he was mistaken.

After spending a few minutes with the Westerners at the hotel, Senator Hawk hurried away to the White House, entering just as Lem Mason was leaving, with his face white and haggard.

At the sight of the thin little man, the owner of the Three Star ranch stopped.

"You're a fine one to shout 'publicity in public affairs!'" he growled, in a voice choking with emotion.

"Are *you* particularly keen for publicity in this Deep Creek Ranch Improvement Company business?" returned the Senator, calmly.

"Whether I am or not is none of your busi-

ness. But you'll get all the publicity out of this you want and perhaps a little more.

“The President may be able to make me resign but he can't make me keep my mouth shut! I'll tell the story to the correspondents and the people can judge if I deserve such treatment.”

“Don't be a fool, Mason,” snapped the Senator. “Remember, the least said, the soonest mended.”

“None of your pussy-cat methods for me, Hawk. Why didn't you give me a square deal?”

“What do you mean?”

“You introduced Roberts and the others to the President, didn't you?”

“Yes.”

“Then why didn't you give me a chance to state my side of the case instead of leaving me to come in after the dirty work had been done?”

“Careful, Mason. In the first place, I knew nothing as to why my friends wanted the interview. Hand asked for it and I arranged it to accommodate him. But as my recollection serves me, in view of what was disclosed, I should think you would be very glad you were not there. However, we'll not argue the matter. I should advise you, though, to take your medicine like a man. The facts won't look well in print.”

"Oh, they won't, eh? Well, you may get a surprise, Mr. Senator. I reckon Newcomb and his friends have some influence out West."

And with this parting shot, the angry ranchman hastened away to his hotel, where he summoned the correspondents and told them a story which seemed to make the Ranch Improvement Company and himself the victims of a political conspiracy. Having made this point, as he thought, Mason went on to say that his self-respect had compelled him to resign, in fact, his resignation was already in the hands of the President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives and that it was his purpose to return to Wyoming, become a candidate for the vacancy he himself had created, vindicate his honor, and incidentally that of the syndicate, and come back to Washington, triumphant.

To his heart's content, the correspondents let the owner of the Three Star ranch talk, now and then interposing a question. But when he had finished, the former Congressman would have been very much surprised had he seen the haste with which they went to the White House. For the newspapermen had heard rumors of questionable actions on the part of the syndicate and they were loath to believe a man of Mason's type

would voluntarily give up his seat in the House of Representatives.

Having stated the purpose of their call, they were admitted to the library of the Chief Magistrate and found Senator Hawk with him.

“I see you are taking Dave Roberts’ advice,” smiled the President. “What is it you wish of me?”

“Mr. Mason says he has resigned,” said their spokesman.

“So he’s been talking?” asked the Chief Magistrate, his face growing serious.

“He has; moreover, his statement is remarkable.” And the spokesman for the correspondents gave a hurried outline of what Mason had told them.

When he had finished, the President seemed lost in thought.

“I’m sorry Mr. Mason should have done this,” he said at last.

“Will you tell us the facts, Mr. President?”

“I prefer not to.”

“He says you hold his resignation.”

“I do.”

“Did you ask it—or suggest it?”

“What did Mason say?”

“He said he gave it voluntarily.”

At this reply, so at variance with the Chief Executive's promise to Old Honesty, not a muscle moved in his face.

"Then suppose we let it go at that," he commented.

"But, Mr. President," protested the spokesman, "we know a great deal about the syndicate. We also know Mason—and he doesn't seem like the man to *give* up his seat in Congress. You believe in publicity in public affairs, why not apply your principles and give us the truth of the matter?"

For several minutes, the Chief Magistrate thrummed his chair—and when he spoke, he showed the bigness of heart which endeared him to all who knew him intimately.

"Boys, what is the use, as the saying goes, of 'jumping on a man when he is down?' Mr. Mason stood sponsor for a bill in which there were some glaring misstatements. He has seen fit to resign. His support of the bill has turned the people of Deep Creek, his fellow ranchers, against him. He is dead politically. He will not run for re-election when he learns the feeling of the people of Wyoming toward him. When the members of the—er—syndicate hear he has talked to you he will find he is dead with

them, also. Why should I add to his trouble?

“Now let me tell you something. Lem Mason has a daughter whom he worships and who believes in him—or has up to now.

“The poor fellow is so upset, he doesn’t realize what he has been saying. Now I want you to do something for me—just think of that young girl out there—she has no mother—and tell me what is the use of printing that—er—wild statement?”

As the newspapermen realized the big-hearted motives that prompted this statement which practically amounted to a request, they gazed at him in silent admiration.

“But, Mr. President, the unmasking of the syndicate is the biggest sensation Washington has had in years,” asserted one of the correspondents.

“I grant you that, or rather that it will be when the syndicate is unmasked. If you print the story now, you will fire your gun at half-cock, whereas by waiting a few days you can have the whole business. If I were you, I should see Mr. H. Chester Newcomb, a member of the so-called syndicate. He may give you some facts that will put a different light on the matter.”

"And what do you suggest we do about Mason?"

"I should think you could just make the announcement that he has resigned. And now, good night."

The next morning when the owner of the Three Star ranch opened his paper on the train which was speeding him to Wyoming, for he had packed his belongings and started for home within three hours after his interview, he was obliged to search the pages twice before he saw a paragraph in the Washington notes which said:

"Congressman Lemuel Mason, owner of the Three Star ranch in Deep Creek Valley, Wyoming, to-day resigned his seat as representative of the First Wyoming Congressional District and returned to his ranch."

Enraged at what he told himself was the muzzling of the press, Mason rushed to a writing desk in the library car and was furiously composing telegrams which should scare the newspaper owners into printing his statement, when a porter entered, calling:

"Telegram for Mr. Mason! Telegram for Mr. Mason!"

Beckoning the porter, the owner of the Three

Star Ranch took the envelope, tore it open and read the message, his face first flushing then going white. He was obliged to read it a second time ere he grasped the import of the words:

“LEMUEL MASON,

“On Board Sunset Limited, Westbound.

“Have talked with Hawk. Telegraph your resignation as vice-president of Ranch Improvement Company to Bement and to me. Confirm by letter. Any interview given by you will be repudiated.

(Signed) “H. CHESTER NEWCOMB.”

As he realized that he had been cast aside by the men in whose interests he had sold out his neighbors in Deep Creek Valley, Mason staggered to his feet, seized the mass of telegrams he had written, tore them into strips and then returned to his seat in the sleeping car.

“So that’s the thanks I get for doing Newcomb’s dirty work,” he groaned. “He can wait for my resignation till I get good and ready to send it. But there’s one thing they can’t take from me, they can’t stop my sending Polly to college. Oh, my poor little girl. May you never know what it has cost me to make it possible!”

But even this wish was to be denied him.

When he reached the home house of the Three Star, tired, broken and seemingly aged ten years, Polly greeted him with her customary kiss, but he noticed that it was more one of duty than affection.

And his worst fears were realized when the girl said:

"After you get cleaned up and eat, Daddy, I want to talk with you."

"Let's not wait, daughter. What is it?"

"You're sure you are not too tired, Daddy?" she asked. Then, noticing for the first time, how haggard her father looked, she rushed to him, throwing her arms around his neck, and sobbed on his shoulder.

Despite his effort, tears came into Mason's eyes and he patted her head affectionately until he was able to control his voice enough to say:

"There, there, Polly. Don't take on so. What is it that's troubling my girl?"

"Daddy, did you get my college money from that—that Ranch Improvement Company?" she sobbed.

"What makes you think that?" he countered.

"Because everybody says you got money for selling out the Deep Creek ranchers."

"But Sam Roberts isn't sold out."

"Because he went to Washington."

No adequate reply could the disgraced Congressman think of and he was silent.

Controlling herself with great effort, Polly raised her head and took her father's face between her hands.

"Daddy, Daddy dear, didn't you know that I wouldn't take the money at such a price? You love me too well, Daddy. It was my fault for begging you so hard to send me to college. But we'll make it all right, Daddy, by giving the money back."

"It's too late, daughter," breathed the man, in agony.

"Why?"

Briefly the ranchman explained the recent occurrences in Washington.

As she listened, Polly clung the tighter to her father.

"Oh, Daddy, dear Daddy, I've ruined you," she sobbed as he finished. "Can you ever forgive me?"

## CHAPTER VIII

### DAVE ACTS AS PEACEMAKER

**F**EELING deeply their disgrace, both Polly and her father kept to the ranch house. On the day after his return, Bement's agents had posted the notices on the Three Star, but Mason was too broken to offer objection at this further demonstration of the syndicate's hostility and, as Polly had made the cowboys fill every possible receptacle with water on her father's return, there was a meagre supply for the live stock on hand.

"Daddy, let's sell out before the cattle suffer, and then go away somewhere," suggested the girl on the third morning.

"I reckon that's the thing to do, daughter, provided we can find someone to buy." And together they talked over the most likely purchasers. But the prospect was not encouraging for Mason knew the people well enough to realize they would not be keen to help him after what he had done.

While they were thus engaged, there came a loud knock on the door.

With startled faces, father and daughter looked at one another. But neither arose to open the door.

Again came the knock, followed by a cheery voice:

"I say, you're not sick, or isn't anybody home?"

"It's Dave," whispered Polly. "Shall I let him in?"

But the boy solved the question himself by opening the door and walking in.

As he caught sight of the girl and her father, he paused, flushing. Then, squaring his shoulders, he looked straight at the unhappy ranchman.

"I say, Mr. Mason, they've posted your ranch."

"Haven't you and your father done enough to me without your coming here to gloat over me?" snarled the rancher.

Dave's face showed both surprise and pain at the words.

"You know I didn't come for that, Lem," he replied.

"Then why did you come?"

"To ask you to drive your cattle to the Double Moon."

"I'm going to sell."

"To whom?"

"Haven't just decided."

"Then drive your cattle over until you find a purchaser."

"I reckon they can get along on the Three Star while they're here."

"But you haven't enough water to last the day out. Now listen to me, Lem. When one of the boys told me the Three Star was posted, I told father, and he said for me to come over and bring you and Polly and the live stock back. I've told your boys and they're rounding up the cattle and ponies now. So—"

"Seems to me you're taking a good deal on yourself to give orders on the Three—"

"Don't, Daddy, don't," interrupted Polly. "If we keep the live stock, they'll only suffer and die. We can let them go and stay ourselves."

"Dad and Ma said I was to bring you, too," insisted the boy. Then, reading their minds, he added, "The rest of the ranchers are in Curtis to-day and you'll have a chance to get settled before they come back."

“But what’ll they say when they do get back?” asked Polly. “Oh, Dave, can’t you understand?”

“Indeed I do, Polly. The whole thing’s been a mistake, but while we are talking about it we had best settle it once and for all and then forget it. Dad and I heard how Newcomb threw you down, Lem, and we’re sorry. If we weren’t, do you suppose we’d ask you to come to the Double Moon? Dad’s awful mad at the way Newcomb’s treated you.

“He’s got a plan he wants you to help him with so you can get even.”

As she heard the friendly words, Polly’s eyes sparkled for the first time since her father’s return.

“Honest, Dave?” she asked, uncertain of her voice.

“Honest Injun, Polly. He feels just as bad as you do. Why, before he left Washington, he went and asked the President if he wouldn’t withhold your resignation, Lem.”

At this announcement, the owner of the Three Star murmured: “Good Old Honesty!” then buried his face in his hands.

“You’ll come, won’t you?” asked Dave, speaking to the rancher, but looking at Polly.

"I—I can't face the others," stammered Mason.

"Why not? You're a man, Lem, and we—we all know how Newcomb got to you."

Anxiously the two young people watched the sorrowing man.

"No, I can't do it, Dave," he finally said. "It wouldn't be so bad, if it weren't for McCord and White. They'd never stop talking."

"That's where you're wrong, Lem. You take my word for it, neither Sandy McCord nor any one else will so much as mention the business."

"But they'd act mean, and that would be as bad," asserted Polly.

"No, they won't."

"Perhaps the others wouldn't, but how can you make Sandy McCord decent?" demanded the girl.

"Just this way. The Double Moon is the only place Sandy or the others can get water for their cattle, isn't it?"

"Yes," chorused the father and daughter, eagerly, for the thought of being able to meet their old neighbours, without being jeered, was sweet to them.

"Well, there's your answer," smiled Dave.

"But I don't understand," exclaimed Polly, disappointment showing in her face.

"Why, Dad will meet them before they get back and tell them if they don't act white, they can't keep their cattle on the Double Moon!"

"There, Daddy! Now you'll go, won't you?" And the girl put her arms about her father's neck.

But the dread of how his former friends would treat him was not so easily banished.

"I believe *you* mean it, Dave, but will your father do it?" he asked anxiously.

"Sure as you're alive, Lem. He told me himself when I suggested what you are afraid of. And now come on. It will do you both good to have something else to think of."

But despite Dave's well-meant assurance, Mason was not allowed to forget so easily.

Scarcely had Polly and her father lost their feeling of awkwardness under the sincere cordiality of their reception by Old Honesty, his wife and "The Terrors," than there sounded the pounding of rapid hoof beats and Bill Hatch rode up.

His lather-dripping pony and his flushed face bespoke news of importance, but as his eyes rested upon Polly and her father among the

group who had rushed from the door to learn his tidings, his surprise rendered him speechless.

"Lem's brought the Three Star outfit over at my request," said Old Honesty, adding pointedly, "he and Polly are my guests. If you or any of the rest of the Deep Creek ranchers don't treat my friends properly, your cattle can't run the Double Moon range or have its water."

"No need to say that to me, Sam. If you've made up with Lem, I reckon I can."

"That's the way to talk," beamed Old Honesty. "Now tell us why you come back so early before you forget it."

At the mention of his errand, Hatch's face grew angry.

"It's more of Bement and his gang's work!" he snarled.

At the words, all his auditors became grave-faced.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the owner of the Double Moon.

"For five days he's had a gang building a dam above Sandy's Cross and Circle."

In consternation, his hearers looked at one another.

"Reckon we've got to take another trip to

Washington, Dave,” finally exclaimed his father. “Ma, pack our duds. Bud, have Happy Jack get the buckboard ready. By hustling we can get the night train.”

Ere Mrs. Roberts or the boy started to obey, however, the owner of the Barred Circle spoke.

“It would only be a waste of time and money, Sam.”

“Why?”

“Because Bement and his gang are within their rights.”

“Who told you so, Bement?”

“No, Judge Hand. He was in Curtis and when we learned what those robbers were doing, I hunted him up. Hand said the bill gave them the control of the Deep Creek water rights and your injunction only protected water along the Double Moon. Where they are building the dam is above Sandy’s ranch. Bement says they’re going to dig an irrigation ditch through Buffalo Pass.”

“But they can’t interfere with the Double Moon’s water,” declared the ranch owner.

“Not when there is any water along the ranch, but your injunction doesn’t prevent them from stopping the water.”

“Did Hand say that?”

“Uh-uh! He said it only prevented their interfering with the water when there was any.”

“Then we’re done for, until I can get to Congress and have that Ranch Improvement Company bill repealed,” commented Old Honesty, more to himself than to the others.

“No, there is a different way,” returned Hatch. “Hand has drawn another injunction covering interference with your water supply and has telegraphed the facts to Washington. Whether or not he beats out the company depends on how soon the dam can be finished—but it will never be finished.”

At this confident statement, the despair that had settled on the faces of the others lifted.

“Why won’t it?” they chorused.

“Because Sandy and the rest of the boys are going to dynamite the dam to-night! They got the dynamite in Curtis and are on the way, now.”

“Well, they won’t if I can prevent it,” snapped Old Honesty. “Bud, tell Happy to fetch Brimfire and Black Bess. Dave, you’ll go with me. I don’t care to what lengths Bement and his crowd go, while I am running this business no Deep Creek rancher shall violate the law! Between Washington and Hand, we’ll have the injunction in a day or so.”

“You had your way before, Sam, and though you’ve helped us out, I don’t mind telling you that Sandy and one or two of the other boys feel pretty sore because they had to bring their live stock here. I tried to argue with ’em, but they said this was the time for them to act—not talk.”

“Are they armed?” asked the owner of the Double Moon, with a quietness that surprised the others.

“Sandy is.”

“Dave, get our guns.”

“Now, Pa,” began Mrs. Roberts, only to be silenced by a look from her husband.

Just then Bud and the cowboy came up with the two mettlesome horses and, as Dave emerged from the house with cartridge belts and six-shooters, Old Honesty seized his, vaulted into his saddle and raced away, closely followed by his son.

## CHAPTER IX

### POLLY TO THE RESCUE

SO sudden had been the departure of the horsemen that they were almost out of sight before those left about the ranch house door realized the significance of their action.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear! There’s going to be trouble!” exclaimed Mrs. Roberts. “Sandy’s none too fond of Sam and he doesn’t take kindly to Pa’s peaceful notions.” And she wrung her hands in helpless despair.

“Now, don’t you worry, Ma,” said Polly, placing her arm affectionately about the woman she had come to love as she might her own mother. “Bill and I will take a dozen of the ‘boys’ and go help Dave and his Pa. When Sandy sees we’re more than two to one, he won’t do any more than talk.”

As Hatch turned to put the girl’s instructions into execution, the owner of the Three Star ranch looked appealingly at his daughter.

But Mrs. Roberts also saw and read the glance aright. Her quick sympathy made her understand how hard it must be for him not to lend a hand in helping undo what he had done, but she realized, under their present excitement, especially, that the sight of him might lead the ranchmen to some rash act.

“Lem, I wish you’d stay here with me,” she said. “It’s coming night and I’d feel safer to know there was a man with me.”

“All right, Ma, if you feel that way,” answered the unfortunate man, while Polly gave her a quick hug of thanks.

“I’d rather you would stay, too, girl,” said Mrs. Roberts, earnestly.

“But I may be able to do something for Dave,” pleaded Polly. “Besides, I am as good a horseman as any of them, if I do say it.”

No further objection being made, Polly rode away with the owner of the Barred Circle and twelve of the cowboys.

Had the ranchers but known it, it would have been better for them to have remained at the Double Moon, for by their action in riding to the dam they were playing directly into their enemy’s hands.

Bitter at the thought that the honest ranch-

men had exposed the acts of his syndicate, in regard to which he had been able to deceive the nation's ruler because of the latter's belief in his integrity, Chester Newcomb hastened to New York after his discomfiting interview in the Executive offices. There he went into conference with his associates and their shrewd legal advisers. From all angles the matter was discussed and raised maps of the Deep Creek Valley were studied. By chance, one of the lawyers happened to discover the narrow defile through the mountains at the very head of the valley, known as Buffalo Pass, and this gave them their idea for their subsequent actions.

"By building a dam and diverting the water through the Pass onto the plains you can not only cut off the water supply of the Double Moon but you can get back into the President's good graces by declaring that was the intention of your engineers all along, Mr. Newcomb," exclaimed one of the lawyers.

"By Jove, Harkness, you're a genius!" declared the capitalist, enthusiastically. "But how about Roberts' injunction; would the dam interfere?"

"That only applies to the water when there is any and the dam will stop the supply."

“A master stroke! A master stroke!” chuckled Newcomb. “I told the President I would ‘get’ Roberts and this will enable me to do it; and I can make him see he has misinterpreted our motives.”

“That is a rather large order, Chester,” suggested one of his associates.

“Not a bit, not a bit. I can explain that I have so many interests that I cannot familiarize myself with all their details and that it was not until I had consulted with you all that I was informed as to how the plains were to be irrigated beyond the mountains. I’ll go right back to Washington as soon as I have wired instructions to Bement.”

Fearful of exposure, after receiving his principal’s telegram not to oppose the granting of the permanent injunction, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company had kept in close touch with events in the capital and was aware of Lem Mason’s disgrace and all that Old Honesty had accomplished.

Many anxious moments did he pass, alternating between the desire to resign his office before the dreaded crash came and determination to fight the intrepid owner of the Double Moon. It was with grim satisfaction, therefore, that he

received the instructions to build the dam, and not a minute did he lose in putting them into execution.

Gathering a hundred of his hangers-on from Curtis and Sturgis, he rushed them, under cover of darkness, to the site of the dam, with shovels, picks and building materials. That there might be no slip-up, he accompanied them, the better to make them work.

For days the gang worked as they had never worked before, not even stopping at night for there were enough to form two shifts. The creek, at the spot selected, was only about thirty feet wide with an average depth of ten feet, so that the evening of the day before the ranchmen rode into Curtis the dam was well under way.

Left at Curtis to watch the Deep Creek Valley men, no sooner did Crooked Sims learn that McCord and his companions were purchasing dynamite than he jumped to the conclusion of their purpose and sneaked out of town on his fastest pony to carry the information to "Judge" Bement.

He had expected to see his master get furiously angry at his report, but instead, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company slapped his leg, chuckling:

“Good! Good! that’s the best piece of news I’ve heard in many a day.”

Amazed, Crooked said, “All this fuss has gone to your head, ‘Judge.’ I don’t see how blowing up the dam can help us.”

“You ain’t hired to see or think, Crooked, but just to carry out orders. Did any of the gang see you ride up?”

“I don’t believe so.”

“Fine. Couldn’t be better. Now you just stay in my tent here and lay low. I don’t want you to be seen here. Where’d you leave your pony?”

“In a gulch, a couple of rods back.”

“Can the gang see it if they go toward Sturgis?”

“No.”

Without vouchsafing any comment, Bement went out, leaving his hireling sorely perplexed.

“I hope he ain’t gone loco,” sighed Sims, shaking his head. But mindful of his orders, he proceeded to take himself out of sight by crawling under his master’s cot bed.

Hastening to the dam, Bement called his men to him.

“I want you boys to stop work and hit the trail for Sturgis just as lively as you can,” he

said. "Take the horses, but nothing else. It will be dark when you get there. Keep yourself out of sight. In the morning come to Howe's office and I'll pay you. Remember, if one of you shows your head around Sturgis before morning, I'll not only not pay you but I'll drive you out of the country. Now get a move on."

As their chief virtues was obedience to their master, the men lost no time in hitching the horses to the wagons and starting for the town. But as soon as they were out of sight of the dam, their imaginations ran riot as to the cause of the sudden order.

Making sure that every man had gone, Bement went back to his tent.

"Crooked," he called, and, as the fellow crawled from his hiding-place, continued, "bring that box at the head of my cot. Be careful how you handle it. It's full of dynamite."

Picking it up as gingerly as though it were a baby, Crooked followed his master to the dam.

"Set the box on the edge of the creek, get a drill and drill three holes in the centre of the dam," ordered Bement.

"But 'Judge'—"

"Do as I tell you!" he thundered.

Unwillingly, the hireling seized the drill and sledge hammer, waded out to the dam and began the work assigned to him.

It was dark before the task was finished and Crooked came ashore.

Quickly Bement took three sticks of dynamite from the box, wrapped them in paper, attached the fuses and, handing them to his hireling, told him to place them in the holes, himself carrying the box with the rest of the dynamite up the creek, where he submerged it.

The fuses being of the electric type that give a spark, Bement took the ends attached to the batteries as far from the creek as possible.

"See these switches, Crooked?" he asked, indicating two copper strips.

"Uh-uh."

"When I give the word, press them down."

Ere he could utter the command, however, there sounded from the darkness a hail:

"I say, you in the camp!"

"That's Dave Roberts!" gasped Crooked, in a hoarse whisper. "We're—"

"Press the levers!" hissed Bement in his hireling's ear, interrupting.

An instant there was silence, then a deafen-

ing roar, followed by a rain of water and rocks, rent the air.

With an agility that amazed Crooked, Bement, whom he supposed standing beside him, appeared in the door of his tent, a reflector lantern held over his head.

And full in its rays stood Dave Roberts, face aghast.

“Aha! I’ve caught you, my fine fellow; caught you red-handed!” thundered the “Judge,” and leveling a six-shooter, he cried, “I arrest you, Dave Roberts, for dynamiting the dam of the Ranch Improvement Company! Hands up! Crooked, take away his shooting irons and bind him.”

“That’s a lie, and you know it, Marcus Bement!” shrilled a high voice. “Dave came to warn you—not to blow up the dam.”

The unexpectedness of this interruption caused the conspirator to quake for a moment, but quickly recovering himself, he threw the lantern rays in the direction whence the voice had come, disclosing a white-faced girl, hair falling about her shoulders, mounted on a lathered pony.

“Polly!” gasped the boy.

“Get her, Crooked, get her!” shouted Bement.

"Polly Mason, I arrest you as Dave's accomplice."

Quickly Sims leaped to seize the bridle but, like a flash, Polly whirled her tired pony.

"Don't say a word, Dave! Don't offer any trouble! I'll bring help!" she called encouragingly, and disappeared in the darkness as suddenly as she had come.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TABLES ARE TURNED

UNNERVED at the startling appearance of the girl, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company trembled like a leaf as he gazed in the direction she had gone.

When his hireling had brought him information that the Deep Creek ranchers had purchased dynamite and were coming to the dam, he had conceived the idea of blowing it up and laying the blame on the cattle owners. Owning scores of hangers-on, body and soul, he would only need to teach them a plausible story to which to swear to in court, and to arrange, through his political influence, so that his henchmen should form a majority of the jury. And this done, no matter what evidence the ranchmen might present in court, the man he should select as his victim would be found guilty.

Dave's sudden arrival at the dam had solved the problem as to the one upon whom his choice should fall. Moreover, it seemed to him a spe-

cial favour of Fate, an augury for the success of his plot. Even the presence of the girl, to whose complicity his minions would swear, could have been used with striking effect—but her escape, the fact that he was in ignorance as to how long she had been in the vicinity and what she had seen, and her promise to the boy to fetch aid, put an entirely different face on the matter.

Despite his demoralization, however, he realized that he must lose no time in getting Dave to a place where guards could watch him, for he was shrewd enough to understand that his prisoner could be used as a hostage whose possession might possibly enable him to dictate his own terms.

Accordingly he called to Sims: "Go bring three horses so we can get a start with our prisoner before his friends come."

Overjoyed at the opportunity of putting as many miles as possible between him and the band of ranchmen and cowboys Polly would round up, Crooked hastened to obey, but when he returned he only brought his own pony.

"The boys took every critter in camp," he explained.

This announcement proved too much for the

overwrought nerves of the "Judge" and he sought relief in a vigorous outburst of invective.

"Any place near here where I can hide with Dave while you ride to Sturgis and get horses and the sheriff?" he finally asked. "I'd rather go myself but I'd break your pony's back inside of five miles."

"The only place I know—that is, where you'd be really safe—is Injun Joe's shanty in the mountains. He hates Sam Roberts as much as you—"

"How far is it?" hurriedly interrupted Bement, nodding toward their prisoner in warning for his hireling to be careful what he said.

"Not more than ten miles."

"Not *more*," groaned the "Judge." "How'd you like to walk ten miles if you weighed close on to three hundred pounds, and in the dark at that?"

There being no other course open, however, they started, Crooked riding, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company easing his weight by a hold on the left stirrup strap, while just in front of him walked Dave, securely bound to the pommel of the saddle.

For a mile they had travelled when all at once

they heard the pounding of a troop of hard-riding men.

"Sounds like a regiment," whispered Crooked. But his master paid him no heed.

Quickly drawing his six-shooter, Bement pressed the muzzle against the back of Dave's neck.

"That's just to warn you what will happen if you make a sound," he snarled.

"We'll never make Injun Joe's shanty," declared Crooked. "It won't be fifteen minutes after they find we're not at the dam before they strike our trail."

"How will they find it?"

At this evidence of lack of plain-craft, Crooked snorted. "There's dew on the grass, isn't there?"

"I don't know."

"Well, there is."

"What of it?"

"Why, it will show 'em our course. We might just as well have left a note telling where we were going."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Not much, I reckon. As I see it, the only thing is for you and Dave to hide in the grass

while I go on to Sturgis for help. There's a bare chance the ranchers will override you."

The idea of being left alone with his prisoner, with the probability of being discovered by a band of ranchers and cowboys who bore him no good-will, was not pleasing to the president of the Ranch Improvement Company, yet he realized the need of getting word of his predicament to his friends in Sturgis.

Untying Dave from the saddle pommel, he helped Sims to gag him and bind his feet, after which they carried him to a declivity where they laid him down, and then Bement stretched out beside him while his henchman galloped away.

Deeply grateful to Dave for his kindness to her father, Polly had ridden with Hatch and the cowboys for several miles. But, eager to be with the boy, she masked her desire under a challenge to Happy Jack for a race. Being mounted on a pony faster than any ridden by her companions, it was easy for her to outrun them.

Just as her horse was swifter than the others, so was Black Bess speedier than Brimfire. Accordingly as dusk began to fall, Dave suggested that he leave his father and ride on ahead.

In due course the girl overtook Old Honesty and, after a few questions, again rode on, arriving at the dam just after Dave's capture.

Although her pony was sorely spent, she urged him to his outmost as she retraced her route, shouting every now and then that her friends might not ride her by.

As twilight in Deep Creek Valley is scarcely more than a moment, when the cowboys saw Polly dash ahead, they set to work on their mounts with spurs and quirts, riding like fiends, for she was the pet of them all and it did not please them to think of her riding alone through the valley where Bement or members of his gang might be afield.

In short order they overhauled the owner of the Double Moon and as he told them of the girl's leaving him, he, as well as they, rode hard.

Because of their fears for her safety, Polly had put little more than two miles between herself and the dam when her hails were answered.

In quick, panting sentences she told the stern-faced men what she had seen and heard.

“Happy, pick a couple of men and ride back to the Double Moon with Polly,” commanded Old Honesty, as the girl finished speaking.

“There are not enough men in Deep Creek

valley to make me go back when Dave's in trouble," exclaimed the girl.

"But this is men's work—not a woman's," returned Roberts.

"I can ride and shoot as well as any of you," retorted Polly.

"Better take her, there are so many of us," counselled the owner of the Barred Circle. "We're only wasting precious time in arguing."

"All right," asserted Old Honesty, reluctantly. And the cavalcade swept on to the dam. Halting just beyond the rays of the lantern which Bement had neglected to extinguish, the owner of the Double Moon, Hatch and half a dozen of the cowboys, dismounted and crept cautiously toward the camp, while the others sat with six-shooters levelled, ready to rush in should resistance be offered.

A hasty reconnaissance, however, showed that the camp was deserted, and picking up the lantern, Old Honesty signalled to the others to ride in.

"There's not a soul here," he announced as they came up.

"Then search for their trail," said Polly, dismounting as she spoke.

"No use in going about things haphazard,"

declared Hatch. “Some of you boys rustle out lanterns or torches—and be careful.”

Heedless of the caution, the cowboys ransacked the tents, returning quickly with a dozen lanterns, and as soon as they had lighted them, they spread out.

“Here are a couple of batteries with insulated wires attached,” shouted Hatch, bending over the instruments that Bement, in his nervousness and anxiety, had forgotten to conceal.

“Follow the wires and find their ends,” instructed the owner of the Double Moon.

The force of the explosion, however, had thrown the loose ends of the wires to the bank of the creek.

“That won’t make any difference,” declared Old Honesty when apprised of the fact. “The presence of the batteries shows Bement helped blow up his own dam. I know Dave didn’t have one. Did Sandy or others buy any in Curtis, Bill?”

“No.”

“Good. I reckon this puts Marcus about where we want him. Spread out again, boys, and see what you can find.”

“Why do you bother about *things* instead of searching for Dave?” demanded Polly, angrily.

Barely had the words left her mouth, however, when there came a shout from Happy Jack.

"I've struck their trail," he cried. "There's one pony and two men on foot."

Instantly the others gathered about him and as they beheld the tracks through the dew-laden grass, they cheered.

"Can't travel fast on foot," declared the owner of the Barred Circle. "Come on, boys." And he set out along the trail.

With a bound, Polly started to follow them. But Roberts caught her by the arm.

"It's no place for you out there, girl," he said, nodding toward the plains. "There's no telling what may happen."

"Think of Dave! He—"

"I do—and that's why I'm staying here with you."

"But I want to help."

"Then we'll search the camp. The boys will be able to get Dave and we may find things here that can be used as evidence in court."

Realizing that she would not be allowed to follow the trail, Polly made the best of the situation and helped the owner of the Double Moon examine the tents and camp.

Their discovery that the horses and wagons were gone explained the absence of the gang of laborers and they were just making ready to inspect the breach in the dam when the cowboys returned with Dave and his erstwhile captor.

As Bement and Old Honesty were brought face to face, they stared at one another in silence.

"This will prove a bad day's work for you, Marcus," said the latter.

"Maybe you'll change your mind when your son is put on trial," sneered the president of the Ranch Improvement Company.

"You're not going to carry your bluff *that* far, are you?"

"I don't know what you mean," stormed Bement. "Your son dynamited the dam and I am certainly going to prosecute him."

"Even when I have *these?*" smiled Old Honesty, suddenly producing the batteries. "You are pretty cunning, Marcus. When we heard the explosion, we thought Sandy and the others had outridden us. Dave and I and the others started out to prevent them from violating the law. As we did not overtake them, fearing a change in their plans, Dave rode ahead to warn

you. Polly has told us how you treated him. It was a mighty clever scheme, Marcus, but her appearance rattled you and you forgot to hide the batteries. I—”

“What are you going to do with Bement?” interrupted the owner of the Barred Circle.

“Just leave him here, I reckon. There isn’t a horse in the camp and if he wants to go anywhere he will be obliged to walk. I can’t imagine any worse punishment for a man like Marcus Bement than to be obliged to walk.”

The picture which the men conjured in their minds of the president of the Ranch Improvement Company trudging over the plains sent them into roars of laughter, and after regaling themselves with food they found in the camp, they started homeward, Old Honesty carrying the batteries.

## CHAPTER XI

### OLD HONESTY SELECTS HIS ISSUES

**E**NRAGED at the turn in affairs which had changed him from victor to vanquished, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company rushed after the horsemen.

"You think you are pretty smart, Sam Roberts, but you forget one thing. I'm a deputy sheriff and you are interfering with the law by forcibly taking my prisoner from me," he shouted.

Well did Bement know the respect in which the owner of the Double Moon held the law of the land, and he had shrewdly made use of this knowledge to obtain a further hearing with the ranchman in the hope that his quick wit would enable him to hit upon some expedient by which he could make his position a little less desperate.

But, though Old Honesty drew rein at his hail, he was destined to get little comfort out of the interview.

"Why don't you arrest yourself, if you are so keen to get the man who blew up the dam," taunted Hatch.

"Easy, Bill," cautioned Roberts. "Marcus never did the trick."

"There, you see, Sam knows I've called the turn," gloated Bement, but the rancher's next words vanished his complacency.

"Bill, you ought to know Marcus better than to think *he* would implicate himself," asserted Old Honesty. "He always clears *his* skirts by making his hangers-on do the work. Do you really think, Marcus, in view of all the circumstances, that you wish to place Dave again under arrest?"

"You'll find when the case comes up in court that it isn't so one-sided as you think, Sam Roberts," growled the president of the Ranch Improvement Company. "I have some influence myself and my friends have more."

"Meaning Newcomb and his associates, I suppose?" chuckled Old Honesty.

"You'll learn mighty quick who I mean," retorted Bement.

"Well, I wouldn't count too much on Newcomb, if I were you, Marcus. You know how he treated Lem, by whose support of the bill

he was enabled to put it through. As near as I can size things up, Newcomb doesn't have much use for a bungler; and it looks as though you had bungled this dynamiting." Then dropping his banter, the owner of the Double Moon continued: "If, after you have cooled down and thought the matter over, you still want to arrest Dave, you'll find him at my ranch. Moreover, I'll see to it that he goes with you peaceably." And again Old Honesty gave the word to ride on.

In high spirits, the little band started once more, only to halt when they had advanced about five miles.

"Here come Sandy and the others, I think," announced the owner of the Double Moon. "You hail them, Bill."

"Oh, you Sandy!" shouted Hatch, while the cowboys made ready to act should the oncoming horsemen prove other than their friends. Their suspense was short-lived, however, for quickly came an answer:

"That you, Bill?"

"Right-o," replied the owner of the Barred Circle, and in a few minutes the two parties met.

At first, inclined to be angry at what he thought boded interference with his plans, when

the Scotchman was informed of all that had transpired, his wrath was appeased.

"So long as the dam has been blown up, I reckon it's just as well Bement did it," he declared, and then explained the failure of the others to meet him and his companions by saying that they had hidden in a bend of the creek till dark that their movements might not be seen.

It was a very merry troop that rode into the yard of the Double Moon home house some three hours later, but their light-heartedness was somewhat checked by the sight of Judge Hand among those who hurried out to greet them.

"What is it now?" asked Old Honesty, anxiously.

"No more bad news, Sam," smiled the Judge. "The new injunction will be granted and to-morrow you must take the stump to secure your nomination as candidate for the First Wyoming Congressional District."

"Why to-morrow, Hand?"

"Never mind now, Pa. Come in and have something to eat. Then the Judge will tell you all about it," interrupted Mrs. Roberts.

Their delight at the outcome of the night ride forgotten in this new development, the ranchers

sent their ponies to the corral by their cowboys and trooped into the house, where they were soon eating a hot supper.

"Now tell me about this candidate business, Hand," said Roberts as they finished the meal.

Drawing a telegram from his pocket, the Judge handed it to the owner of the Double Moon. "First of all, read that," he said.

Adjusting his spectacles, Old Honesty perused the yellow paper.

"JUDGE ISRAEL HAND,

"Curtis, Wyoming.

"Injunction will be arranged if explosion prevented. There will be an extra session of Congress. Election to fill Wyoming vacancy will be ordered immediately. See to it that our choice is nominated and then elected. Make campaign on honesty and publicity in public affairs and direct primaries. Shall be in Chicago for a week. Wire if you need advice or anything. Be sure to win.

(Signed) "HAWK."

"Well, we can't prevent the explosion, that's certain," he commented, reading the message again.

"Inasmuch as the Ranch Improvement Company dynamited their own dam, that will not interfere with the injunction," said the lawyer, "and you have your answer as to the need of

haste in the rest of the telegram. Now let's map out our campaign."

"Do what?"

"Decide the local issues on which you will ask the nomination. Hawk has told you what national measures to advocate."

"H'm," commented the ranchman, looking at the telegram. "I don't see anything about 'local issues' in this. It says 'make campaign on honesty and publicity and direct primaries.' Why not do it?"

"The Senator means for you to use those when you wish to state in what ways you will support the administration. He is clever enough to leave the choice of local issues to you," declared the Judge.

"Why not make them the local issues, too?"

"Because you must tell the people here in Wyoming what you will do for them—you must give them reasons why they should choose you as their Congressman rather than someone else."

"But how can I tell beforehand what I will do?"

"That has nothing to do with it. Politics, at present, is an eminently practical game, Sam. You must show the voters of this district, and

the men who control votes, wherein it will be to their advantage to support you. Promise to work for the erection of a new federal building in Sturgis, to urge new land- and water-right laws, anything that will make them believe they will derive some material advantage by sending you to Congress."

"How does that fit in with my instructions to advocate 'honesty' in public affairs?"

"Sam, you are enough to try the patience of a saint!" exclaimed the lawyer. "I tell you, there is a practical side to politics as well as an ideal. People will listen while you talk reform, but they will not vote for you unless they think you will do something for them. That's why Bement and his ring and Newcomb and his can control votes. The boys know they will put money in their pockets. They—"

"Stop! Stop right there, Judge!" interrupted Old Honesty, pounding the table. "If you think I am going to buy votes, you are mightily mistaken. I don't want the nomination, if that's the way I must get it."

"Easy, Sam," smiled the lawyer. "I said no such thing. I know you too well. What I mean is this: The erection of a government building will mean work for all classes of labor-

ers and artisans and a market for men who deal in building materials. Proper water- and land-right laws will prevent a repetition of this Ranch Improvement Company business and mean money to the landowners by assuring them that after they have put time and money into their property they will not be in danger of losing it. That is what it means to convince the voters you will work for their interests."

"H'm, I understand. I reckon I can advocate land- and water-right laws but we don't need a new government building at Sturgis."

"But that will win you the votes the contractors control," interposed Lem, who with the others had listened with mingled interest and amusement to the objections of the honest ranchman.

"Then I will lose them. I refuse to advocate anything in which I do not believe."

"No wonder the President said he wanted more 'clean' men like you in Congress," smiled the Judge. "Then we will make new water- and land-right laws your local issue. With this Deep Creek matter so fresh, it ought to be a winner!"

"How about the direct primaries?" asked Old Honesty.

“You can work your talk about them in with the local issue,” declared the Judge.

“But what do they mean?”

For a moment the Judge looked at the ranchman to see whether or not he was joking him, but the earnestness of his expression precluded the idea and he replied:

“At present, candidates for Congress, State office, and the Presidency are nominated by delegates assembled in conventions. These delegates are first nominated in gatherings of the voters, called caucuses. They are elected in other gatherings of the voters called primaries. As soon as the delegates are elected, the men who are seeking nomination for the higher offices, their friends and combinations interested in their election or defeat, begin to work for the vote of each delegate. The candidate may be corrupt or otherwise unfit for office, but if he receives a majority of the delegates’ votes he is nominated. The delegate may be an honest man or he may not. Once he has been elected, the voters are obliged to accept his action. It is through their ability to control delegates that political rings and bosses maintain their rule. On the other hand, with direct primaries the voters would cast their ballots first hand for the various

candidates for office. In order to continue their rule, rings and bosses would be obliged to control hundreds of voters—a much more difficult proposition than to control a score or so of delegates—which accounts for their desperate opposition to the direct primaries.”

“I reckon I’m for direct primaries,” declared Old Honesty. “When did you say I was to tell the boys I am a candidate?”

“To-morrow.”

## CHAPTER XII

### OLD HONESTY GETS AN INSIGHT INTO PRACTICAL POLITICS

**A**S Old Honesty, accompanied by Dave and Judge Hand, drew rein in front of the Curtis courthouse on the following morning, he was greeted with cheers, punctuated by shouts of "Hooray for our next Congressman!"

In amazement, the ranchman looked at the shouting, gesticulating men and then turned toward the Judge.

"How did they find out I was a candidate?" he asked.

The pressure of the crowd about him and their eagerness to shake his hand saved the jurist from the necessity of making any reply as, with face happy and flushed at the greeting, Old Honesty listened to their noisy pledges of support, for which he thanked them heartily.

As he noted the ranchman's delight at his reception, Judge Hand's conscience smote him.

No sooner had he received the telegram from Senator Hawk, during the previous afternoon, than he had arranged with several of his friends to be at the courthouse and to cheer the owner of the Double Moon when he should appear. Fully aware that any demonstration in the courthouse square would quickly attract a crowd, the jurist had decided it would be advisable for his candidate to make his first impromptu speech to a friendly audience, and for this he had also arranged.

Accordingly, when the original assemblage had been increased to more than a hundred, the Judge nodded to one of his assistants and instantly there sounded cries of "Speech! Speech!" which were laughingly repeated from all parts of the crowd.

In despair, the rancher turned toward the jurist.

"You talk to them, Hand. I never made a speech in my life," he pleaded.

"You must begin some time, Sam, and now is as good as any," smiled the Judge.

Enjoying Old Honesty's embarrassment, the cause of which they readily comprehended, the assemblage began to cry in unison, "Speech! Speech! Speech!"

Raising his hand, the owner of the Double Moon beamed about him.

“I never made a speech before in my life—but if you can stand it, I reckon I can. I am a candidate for Congress from the First Wyoming district, which means Harker County. You all know me, or about me—so you will know that if you send me to Washington I’ll do and vote as I think right—not the way someone tells me to.”

“That’s the talk! We don’t want any more Congressmen like Lem Mason!” shouted one of the crowd.

“Now see here, are you making this speech or am I?” demanded Old Honesty, turning angrily in the direction whence the interruption had come.

“You are, Sam,” chorused a score of voices.

“All right—then I’ll do the talking. Lem may have made a mistake, but to show you what I think of him I want you to know that right now Lem Mason and his daughter Polly are living on my ranch. If I thought he was dishonest, do you suppose I would have him there?”

Filled as the people were with all sorts of sensational stories in regard to the former congressman’s connection with the Ranch Improvement

Company and aware of how close the company had come to ruining the Deep Creek ranchmen, this announcement surprised its hearers, first into silence and then into cheers.

“Have *you* sold out to Bement and his gang, too?” demanded a voice, as the outburst subsided.

“That slur is not worthy of an answer,” retorted the candidate. “When I get to Washington, the first thing I shall do will be to introduce bills in Congress that will protect the land- and water-rights of all property owners, so that no syndicate or their hirelings can jeopardize the property of honest men as this Ranch Improvement Company did Deep Creek Valley. And you may be sure I shall take care that this Ranch Improvement Company bill is repealed.”

“Going to rewrite the Constitution, also?” taunted a voice.

“If I did, I should take pains to see it contained a clause that only honest men should be allowed to vote,” retorted the ranchman, and the laughter which this thrust evoked effectually silenced his heckler.

“I am also going to work for direct primaries,” continued the candidate. “Then you and

I can vote first-hand for the men we know are fit to hold office, instead of leaving that to a delegate who can be led around by his nose.”

“Good boy, Old Honesty! We’re for you!” chorused a group of men.

“Then prove it by voting for me! Come on, Judge, let’s attend to that business of ours.”

Instead of complying, however, Judge Hand shouted, “My friends, I wish to talk to you a moment. When certain people learn that Sam Roberts is a candidate for Congress, they will try to turn heaven and earth to defeat him. Thanks to his clean life, they cannot besmirch his character, but they will spend money like water to down him. He is not the type of man a lot of powerful people want at Washington. It is for you to decide whether or not you wish the First Congressional District in Wyoming to be represented by a man of Old Honesty’s type, or by one who owes his election to special interests. If you decide for Sam, I want you to work for him. You will be offered money, business, contracts, to vote against him—and you will realize when that time occurs to what an extent he is feared by certain men. “Why, my friends, in making this campaign, Old Honesty is running the risk of grave personal injury, not

alone to himself but to his family. What seems like an ordinary election for Congressman is, in reality, because of the interests and forces involved, the most important election held west of the Mississippi since Reconstruction days. Now remember, it will not be enough to vote for Old Honesty yourself, *you must persuade others to vote for him*. If you don't, you may wake up some morning and find that the homes or property you have bought do not belong to you after all."

As the Judge finished speaking, his hearers were silent, but it was a silence of sympathy, not of hostility, for the people were dumbfounded as they grasped the full meaning of his words.

Well satisfied with the effect he had produced, Judge Hand linked his arm through Old Honesty's and passed with him into the courthouse, Dave at their heels. And as they disappeared within the door, the air rang with cheers for the intrepid ranchman.

Entering one of the rooms occupied by the election commissioners, Judge Hand asked, "When will the primary be held, Thomson?"

"Day after to-morrow, Judge."

"This is some of Bement's work!" stormed the Judge. "It is not fair to Sam Roberts! Be-

ment has his political machine in good working order and we shall not have time even to form a preliminary organization. Why, it will be impossible for Sam to visit all the towns in the district in forty-eight hours. Thomson, I am surprised that you should lend yourself to such a trick."

"It is none of my concern if Roberts has not effected an organization throughout the district," snapped the election commissioner. "Sam's a fool to try to fight Marcus, anyhow."

So angry was he at the discovery of Bement's shrewd move that the jurist had registered his protest in tones so loud they had been distinctly audible in the corridors, instantly attracting a crowd of curious men to the office, who had entered just in time to hear the commissioner's retort.

"You are more likely to prove the fool than Sam, Thomson," retorted the Judge. "The fact Bement ordered the primary so soon shows in what fear he is of Old Honesty. If we have him scared now, we shall have him on the run before election. By the way, what date has Bement selected for that?"

Angered at the charge that the election commissioners were at the beck and call of the

president of the Ranch Improvement Company, Thomson fairly shouted:

"I'll have you understand the election commission does not take orders from Bement or anyone else."

"Better tell that to someone who doesn't know the ins and outs of Harker County politics, Thomson," exclaimed the Judge. "But you haven't answered my question. When will the election be held?"

"That hasn't been decided," stammered the commissioner.

"Oho! Bement is waiting to see which way the 'cat jumps' at the primary, eh? Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Commissioner. The law says that in cases of emergency an election for Congressman shall be held within twenty days after the order for election. I tell you, Mr. Commissioner, Bement or no Bement, I will see to it that the law is obeyed in this instance."

"But there is no emergency in this election, so the commissioners can name their own date," declared Thomson.

"No emergency, eh?" repeated the Judge. "I reckon you will think differently after you hear from Washington. But we will not waste any more time arguing the matter. Come on,

Sam. Our work is 'cut out' for us if we are to make any sort of showing at the primary."

Again linking his arm through the ranchman's, the jurist was forcing a passage through the excited group of men when the president of the Ranch Improvement Company pushed his way into the room.

"You are just the man I am looking for," he announced, looking at the owner of the Double Moon.

"I have no idea what you can possibly want with me, unless it is to recover those batteries," declared Old Honesty.

"Come over to the hotel and I will tell you."

"Sorry, but I haven't the time, Marcus, after the trick you played about the primary."

"So you are really a candidate, Sam?" grinned the local political boss. "I heard the boys talking about it outside, but I didn't believe it—I thought you were too level-headed to make such a fool of yourself. But as long as it is true, there is all the more reason why I should talk with you. You may change your mind. Come on."

The owner of the Double Moon was in no mood, however, for a private interview with his arch-enemy.

"If you have anything to say to me, Marcus Bement, you can say it here and now. I will not go to the hotel or anywhere else with you," he exclaimed.

With difficulty restraining the satisfaction this answer gave him from appearing on his face, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company replied:

"Very well, Sam—only don't say I didn't give you the chance to keep this thing quiet. There is a mortgage of eight thousand dollars on the Double Moon ranch, isn't there?"

At the words, a gasp arose from the auditors while Old Honesty blanched, though his voice was steady as he answered:

"There is and the Curtis Savings Bank holds it."

"You are wrong there, Sam. *I* hold it," announced Bement, tapping his pocket.

"How did you get it? When did you get it?" demanded Roberts, angrily.

"I bought it from the bank."

"When?"

"What does that matter, inasmuch as I have it?"

"It matters a great deal, Marcus Bement," interposed Judge Hand. "I happen to know

the bank held that mortgage as late as yesterday afternoon because, knowing you, I looked it up when Sam decided to become a candidate. Moreover, the president of the bank assured me he would not sell it."

"Evidently he has changed his mind, for here it is, duly transferred," retorted Bement, producing the document.

Pausing a moment to enjoy the effect his ownership of the paper produced upon the honest ranchman, he continued: "Since I bought it something has happened which makes it imperative that I have the money before noon to-morrow. If I do not receive it, or what I consider its equivalent, by twelve o'clock to-morrow noon, I shall take your ranch."

"I suppose you mean by 'its equivalent' that you will not foreclose if Sam agrees not to be a candidate," sneered Judge Hand. "In the first place, you cannot foreclose on twenty-four hours' notice."

"I have stated my terms, Hand—I am willing to let the courts decide as to my right to foreclose. Remember, the money or the ranch by twelve o'clock to-morrow. If you want to talk with me, Sam, I will see you alone at the hotel any time this afternoon."

Thoroughly enjoying the sensation he had produced, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company was leaving the room when Judge Hand exclaimed:

“I told you outside, men, that Bement and his gang would stop at nothing to defeat Old Honesty. You have heard their first move—his home or his withdrawal as a candidate, for that is what Bement’s offer ‘to see him alone’ really means. I’ll warrant, also, that Bement has seen to it that no bank in Harker County will lend Sam any money. But Sam won’t withdraw and Bement will not get the Double Moon! Now tell me, men, do you prefer a Congressman like Bement, or Old Honesty?”

“Clear out of here! The election commission’s rooms are not run for political heelers to spout in!” shouted Thompson, in a frantic attempt to block the demonstration.

Vain was his effort, however, for with a vehemence which shook the windows, the men yelled:

“Old Honesty! Old Honesty! Down with Bement and his gang!”

## CHAPTER XIII

### LEM MASON MAKES AN OFFER

**D**ESPITE their brave front, it was with heavy hearts that Old Honesty and Judge Hand left the courthouse, and so absorbed was each in his own thoughts that neither noticed Dave was not with them.

Crowded away from his father by the excited men who struggled to get just as close as possible to the chief actors in the remarkable scene in the election commissioner's rooms, Dave had found himself wedged into a corner behind two men whom he had never seen before and who seemed to take no interest in their surroundings.

Drawing up his arm preparatory to forcing his way past them, the boy quickly changed his mind as he heard the shorter of the two speak.

"I tell you there is no risk," he said. "Marc is strong enough to 'colonize' the whole of Har-ker County, if he wants to. All you have to do is watch the fifty men I shall send across the line from Newcomb's mine. You can't vote

them all in Boniface, I know, but you can vote twenty-five. Send the rest to Palfrey under a man you can trust. But, remember, don't have them vote unless you receive a telegram from me saying 'No use.' Get those words 'No use' fixed in your mind. Marc only wants to have the votes on hand in case of emergency, anyhow. Here's two hundred dollars to pay for them. We shall know by three o'clock whether it will be necessary to vote them or not. If it is, you will have time enough before the polls close at four. Forgotten the code words?"

"Sure not, they are 'No use.'"

"Good, and now get out of here with the crowd so you won't be noticed and make your 'get-away' from Curtis as soon as you can. If I wish to get any instructions to you, I'll 'phone Long John's place in Boniface. You can trust him, Marc owns him body and soul, 'staked' him, you know."

Just what the man meant by "colonizing," Dave did not know, but he realized the scheme had a bearing upon his father's candidacy and he drank in every word.

Ere he could get out of the room, however, his father and Judge Hand had left the courthouse and he saw them, surrounded by some

dozen men, making their way up the street. Overtaking them as quickly as possible, he deemed it best to withhold the information he had gained and, as the party entered the house of one of Old Honesty's friends and resolved itself into a council of war, he soon became absorbed in the plan of action outlined by the jurist.

"You men are for Sam through thick and thin, I take it?" asked Judge Hand as they took chairs.

Emphatically each man pledged his support.

"Good!" smiled the jurist. "In view of this mortgage business, however, it is best to find out exactly how we stand. I don't wish you to take offence or to think I am trying to pry into your affairs; the questions I shall ask you are simply for the purpose of learning the precise conditions in order that we may be prepared for any emergency. Have any of you placed mortgages on property, the foreclosure of which would cripple you?"

Several men acknowledged they had borrowed money, giving real estate as security, declaring, however, that though they would be loath to lose the property represented it would not seriously injure them.

“Fine! Fine!” ejaculated the jurist. “I will assure you, on my honour as a judge, that if the mortgages are foreclosed you will not lose your lands. We can prove conclusively that any such foreclosures were a conspiracy on the part of Bement and his associates.

“Now tell me, have any of you, in the natural course of your business, given demand notes to any banks in Harker County—not time notes, for unless such notes come due before two weeks it will make no difference?”

Learning that seven of the men had done so, the jurist asked the amounts.

“That makes a total of \$4,800,” he announced. “Adding Sam’s mortgage of \$8,000 that gives us \$12,800 which must be raised immediately. I have \$3,000 in cash which I will contribute—it goes without saying that because of my friendship for Old Honesty, none of the Harker County banks will lend me any money on my note or real estate. How much will the rest of you contribute?”

Before any of them could reply, the owner of the Double Moon exclaimed: “I don’t want you men to contribute a cent. If I cannot have the nomination without putting my friends in danger of losing money, I don’t want it. I am

willing to risk the loss of my ranch because Bement won't get it without a fight in the courts, but I will not allow my friends to run any risk on my account.”

The words of the honest ranchman evoked looks and sighs of relief from the little group, for not until Judge Hand had asked his very pertinent questions did the men realize what a serious matter the support of Old Honesty's candidacy might prove.

When several moments had passed without any of the men speaking, the jurist said, “It matters not the least to me what you say, Sam, you cannot prevent my contributing my three thousand dollars. That leaves eighteen hundred on the demand notes to be covered. I have a friend in Sturgis who will make that up. Now if we protect your notes, I wish to know if you men will go to the different towns in Harker County and work for votes for Old Honesty?”

Ashamed of their reluctance to support the ranchman at possible danger to their pocket-books, the men eagerly agreed, and quickly the Judge assigned them to different towns.

“What arguments shall we use?” asked one.

“Tell the story of the Ranch Improvement Company and the dam, tell about Bement's trick

in ordering the primary so soon, tell about the mortgage, and then promise that if elected, Old Honesty will be his own master and stand for what is right."

"You've forgotten the honesty and publicity in public affairs and direct primaries," interposed the candidate.

"We can talk about them after you receive the nomination. The appeal for votes at the primary will be made upon your personality and the means your opponents have employed to ruin you," declared the jurist.

"By the way, who are my opponents—at the primaries, I mean?" inquired the ranchman.

"I thought I had told you," smiled Judge Hand. "Bement himself is one of them and his handy-man Bowker, of Benton, is the other."

"Regular two to one combination, eh?" commented Old Honesty.

"Exactly. Bement evidently figures that the voters he cannot compel to cast their ballots for him can be persuaded to support Bowker," explained the jurist.

"But there must be some voters who can't be controlled, Judge," exclaimed Dave, who had followed the proceedings with ill-suppressed excitement.

"There are, of course, but as I said last night, the majority of men vote for the man they think will do something for them."

"I don't wonder so few 'clean' men go into politics," commented Dave, and then he added, "It seems to me you ought to put some workers in Boniface and Palfrey."

"By jove, I forgot those places," said the jurist. "Let me see, whom can I send?"

"I wish you would let me go," pleaded the boy.

"What do you say, Sam?" asked the Judge, looking at Dave's father.

"Isn't he too young and inexperienced?"

"He looks more than twenty-one, he has a level head on his shoulders and I reckon he can present as good an argument as any of the rest of us," replied the jurist, recalling the memorable interview in Washington.

The towns assigned to the boy at his request were the most remote in the entire district, being close to the Colorado line, and Old Honesty was curious to know why he had chosen them rather than places nearer home. Dave, however, was not disposed to divulge his reasons and, after discussing various details, the conference broke up.

The candidate was the cynosure of all eyes as he walked down the street to his pony and mounted. He was hailed with promises of support from some and with taunts and jeers from Bement's followers. But to the surprise of both his son and the Judge, Old Honesty answered neither the one nor the other. He seemed to be absorbed in deep thought. As to the cause of his preoccupation, however, he gave his companions no inkling until they were well on their way to the Double Moon.

"It is queer the way those fellows acted when you asked them to contribute, Hand," he finally exclaimed. "I had thought they were all good friends of mine. Why, if any one of them had come to me and asked for a loan of any sum up to five thousand dollars, I would have obtained the money in some way and done so gladly. And yet the twelve of them were not willing to raise nine thousand eight hundred among them, after you had offered three thousand."

"You must not take it too much to heart, Sam," returned the jurist. "In politics a man has no real friends. His most intimate associate to-day may be his most bitter enemy to-morrow."

"I don't like it, Hand; I don't like it. I should rather go on believing that people were my friends, even if they were not, than to *know* they were not. It sort of shakes a man's faith in human nature to learn the length to which people will go and the methods they will employ to win an election. Why, man dear, I have not been in politics twenty-four hours—yet I am sick of it."

"You surely are not going to withdraw, Sam?" queried the Judge, in alarm.

"And let people say Bement bought me off with that mortgage? You should know me better, Hand. Sam Roberts is no 'quitter.' I merely mean that I do not like the 'practical' side of politics, as you call it. The pressure that can be brought to bear on a man in Congress must be heart-breaking. Just imagine threatening a man with what amounts to the ruin of his family if he refuses to vote as he is told."

"Do you think that would be as great a temptation to a man to abandon his principles as the offer to recompense him so that he could provide for the future comfort of his family?" asked the jurist.

"But they don't really do such things, Judge,

do they?" interposed Dave, before his father could reply.

"Indeed they do, my boy, and they use other methods equally, if not more, difficult to resist. For instance, if a man has a son, they promise to place him in some business or professional position where he will receive a substantial salary. If he has a daughter, they promise a marriage with a man of wealth. If he has an aged mother or father in straitened circumstances, they offer to settle stocks upon her, or him, that pay large dividends. They promise his wife social leadership or whatever she most desires. When a man goes to Congress, the shrewd corruptionists not only study him in order to learn his weaknesses, but they study his family and their desires and ambitions, that they may know in what ways to approach him if they ever find use for his vote or support."

For several minutes after the Judge ceased speaking, the trio rode in silence.

"I think I understand now how Lem came to support the Ranch Improvement Company's bill," said Old Honesty, more to himself than to his companions. "If I go to Washington, I shall divide my property among my family before I start and then I shall know each member

is provided for. That will safeguard me against the temptation to sacrifice my honour for their welfare."

Determined to change the subject, for he saw that his father, despite his apparent calmness, was deeply wrought up, Dave interrupted by asking, "What does 'colonizing' mean when applied to votes, Judge?"

"It means bringing men into a town or city just prior to the time for registration. All voters must be registered, that is, listed with the town clerk or election commissioners, before they can cast a ballot. The law declares that each voter must be a legal resident of a town or precinct, in a city, for a certain length of time, which varies in different States, before he can vote. Registration is a practical certification that he has acquired the legal residence demanded by the law.

"When an election is likely to be decided by a few votes one way or the other, the bosses send their hirelings to certain sections where they can live and acquire the legal residence necessary to vote. As these places are usually lodging houses or questionable resorts run by friends of the bosses and the men are sent in groups, the practice is called 'colonizing,' but it is seldom

done outside of cities. What put the idea into your head?"

"I heard the word and was just wondering as to its meaning," replied Dave, lightly, for he had conceived a plan to frustrate Bement's attempt to "colonize" Boniface and Palfrey and he wished to surprise his father and the Judge with its result.

Arriving at the home house, it was but the matter of a few minutes before the ranchers and the others were informed of Bement's trickery and his purchase of the mortgage.

"I don't see why it need bother you to raise eight thousand dollars, Sam," declared the owner of the Cross and Circle.

"You are right, it will not, Sandy, not while *we* are here," interposed Hatch. "I have twenty-five hundred in cash you can have, Old Honesty. How much will the rest of you contribute?" And the owner of the Barred Circle looked at the other ranchmen whose live stock Roberts had saved from a terrible death.

"I didn't mean *that*," grunted McCord.

"Then what did you mean?" demanded Hatch.

"Why, that if Sam has such rich and influential friends in Washington as he says he has,

Senator Hawk, for instance, all he need do is to telegraph him and borrow the eight thousand.”

“And have Bement learn about it and all his workers say that while I promise to be independent I am, in reality, tied to Senator Hawk? You are crazy, McCord!” snapped Old Honesty. “If I preach a thing I practice it.”

“Sandy was only joking, Sam,” hastily interposed Hatch, in an endeavour to make light of the Scotchman’s meanness and ingratitude. “He will give his share when the time comes. How much will you give, White?”

Before the ranchman could answer, Lem, who had been talking earnestly with his daughter, exclaimed, “I have ten thousand in cash at the bank in Benton. I want you to take it, Sam. Polly has been begging me to give it away—or something. We neither of us like to think of it, to say nothing of keeping it. Now that this mortgage business has come up, if you will take the money in return for your kindness to my girl and me when everyone else was against us, I shall be the happiest man in Wyoming. Understand, I know you too well to ask you to accept it as a gift; I mean that you can take

the money and pay the mortgage Bement holds and have another made out to me.”

Old Honesty, deeply moved, opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say a word, Judge Hand cried, “You *must* take it, Sam. It will make Bement furious to know we have used the money of himself and his associates to pay the mortgage he bought so underhandedly.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### OLD HONESTY TAKES A HAND

FOR the many things that ought to be done by Old Honesty and his associates, the time before the primary was all too short, and after a merry dinner at the ranch house, Judge Hand told Dave to pack up.

“Going on another trip to Washington?” asked McCord, angry at everybody, and himself in particular, because of the unsavoury light in which his recent words had put him.

“No; I am going to Boniface and Palfrey, to do the little I can for father,” replied the boy.

“A lot a youngster like you can do, I—”

“See here, Sandy,” interrupted Judge Hand, impatiently, “you have said a lot of things to-day that have not made you any too popular with Old Honesty’s friends. We are obliged to send Dave down there because we are short of men whom we can trust. If you think you can do better work for Sam than—”

"I don't know anything about politics, Judge," hastily expostulated the owner of the Cross and Circle.

"That is just what I supposed," returned the jurist. "If I were you, considering all that happened before dinner, I should reserve my comments and opinions until I was by myself. Ready, Dave?"

"All but buckling on my holsters, Judge."

"Then come along."

"But—"

"There are no 'buts' about it, boy. In the first place, I do not think you will have any trouble, and in the second, if you should, the last thing you ought to have is a 'gun.' The men along the border will spare a man who is unarmed, while if you wear your weapons it might court trouble."

A nod from his father informed the young ranchman that he shared in the jurist's opinion, and, with a sigh, Dave handed the holsters to Bud. For the moment, he was tempted to repeat the conversation he had overheard in the rooms of the election commissioners, but his desire to deal with the situation himself caused him to hold his tongue, chiefly because he realized that

if Bement's intentions were prematurely disclosed he would conceive other plans which might not be so easy to frustrate.

As the boy started for the door to join those outside, Polly ran up to him and dropped something into his pocket.

“Don't put your hand in there, the others might see you,” whispered the girl. “Judge Hand doesn't know everything—and I should feel safer for you to think you had my ‘friend’ with you. It's my very own that I always carry when I go out by myself, and it is so small no one would ever suspect you had it.”

“Polly, you're a trump!” beamed Dave. Then, an idea flashing into his mind, he added, “If I do not get back before primary day, I wish you would go to Curtis in the afternoon and stay near the telegraph office. If you see a short, heavy man go in, find out if he sends a telegraph message to Boniface. If he does, tell Judge Hand to challenge the votes from Boniface and Palfrey when they are received by the election commissioners.”

“Why, Dave, do you—” began the girl.

“Will you do it, or not?” interrupted the young ranchman.

“Of course I will. Only I think you ought to

tell father or someone about it now, whatever it is."

"I don't," and then he whispered, "I want to surprise them and show them I am of some use."

A quick pressure of his hand was Polly's response of understanding and, without more ado, Dave joined the others, vaulted into his saddle and galloped away.

All the ranchmen save McCord had volunteered to do all they could to "round-up" votes for the owner of the Double Moon, and as they reached the trails leading to the ranches or towns to which they had been assigned, they turned off, until finally only Dave, his father and the jurist remained, Mason and White having been the last to leave them as they turned toward Benton, whether they were going to draw the money to pay the mortgage.

As they rode along, the candidate insisted that he be allowed to accompany his son, but Judge Hand, fearing that the appearance of Old Honesty in the rough border towns might suggest to Bement's followers a simple method of permanently eliminating him from the contest, declared that he wished him to make a speech in Sturgis, adding that it was imperative that the ranchman be on the ground to pay the

mortgage money to the political "boss" at noon, on the next day.

Arrived at his home, the jurist sent some of his servants as messengers to summon several of his friends to a conference.

When they had arrived, Judge Hand spoke casually of the campaign and then said; "It is necessary for us to take some joint action which will enable those of us who intend to work for Sam's election to protect our interests. Bement will do his utmost to prevent any of us from obtaining any banking accommodation."

"How can we do anything? Bement holds the banks in Harker County under his thumb," declared one of the men.

"We must establish a common fund, each one contributing every possible cent. What is needed, we shall use for Old Honesty; the rest will be drawn upon when emergency arises. As I have a safe in the courthouse, I will act as custodian of the money. In this manner, it will not even be necessary for us to rent a safe deposit box from the Bement-ridden banks.

"I have three thousand in bank here which I shall draw out as soon as possible. How much will the rest of you put in?"

"You will have mighty poor picking as far

as I am concerned, Hand," interrupted another. "You know, without my telling you, that you are welcome to every penny I have, but my balance at the bank shows just seven dollars and ninety cents; the banks called my loans this noon."

At this announcement, the jurist and Old Honesty looked at one another in dismay.

"What's the use, Judge?" asked the ranchman. "We will just let this election go and I will 'square my account' with Bement in my own way. I am not willing to cause distress to any of my friends or your friends."

"No, Sam, you will *not* withdraw. The only way to 'down' Bement and his associates, to rid the county of their menace, is by smashing their political power so effectually that they will be unable to recover for some time. It has come to the pass when the people of the First Wyoming Congressional District cannot obtain money from a bank without Bement's permission. Our business, our investments, are at his mercy. When he can control the banks, he has the county by the throat. You are the—"

A knock on the door interrupted the impassioned speech of the jurist, and when he opened it, a young woman, evidently a clerk of one of

the men at the conference, beckoned to her employer, then whispered a few words when he joined her.

"Thank you, Miss Wilkins, for coming to me so promptly. Telephone the bank when you return to my office that I will call on the president at six. I know it will be after hours, but if he is so eager to see me, he can wait."

Purposely had the man spoken distinctly that all at the conference might hear, and when he had closed the door after his clerk, he turned to them, exclaiming; "The Ranchmen's National Bank has just notified me that I must 'take up' a demand note for seven thousand dollars not later than noon to-morrow, and Townsend, the president, wants to know my answer. As it will take every minute of my time between now and then for me to raise the money, I shall not be able to 'line up' votes for Sam, nor can I contribute a cent."

Ere any of the men could speak, Dave turned to Judge Hand. "Judge, you told our friends in Curtis that if the banks sought to foreclose their mortgages, you would bring charges of conspiracy. Why not do it now?"

"We have no proof, boy."

"Isn't it proof enough that Mr. Perry's loan

was called this morning and that since Mr. Bliss was seen to enter your house his loan has been called?" persisted Dave.

"I am afraid not. The bank could explain by saying either that the money was needed or that one of the officials had heard rumors affecting the financial standing of Mr. Perry and Mr. Bliss. Were the loans secured by mortgages, it would be different."

"Why not try it, Hand?" interposed another of the conferees. "There may be notices awaiting the rest of us at our offices. A good, strong 'bluff' might work wonders."

The suggestion met with hearty approval from the others and the jurist was searching his desk for the necessary forms upon which to draw up the notices of the suit when Old Honesty spoke.

"So long as you refuse to let me withdraw, suppose you let me have a say in what is to be done," he commented, dryly.

Eagerly his friends turned to him.

"You spoke of establishing a joint fund, Hand. From what has just happened, it seems to me the sooner you do it, the better. Let us all, right now, go down to the bank. You men can say you wish to withdraw your money. A little

‘straight talk’ might cause the officials to assume a different attitude toward all business men in the county who are my friends.”

The suggestion met with eager approval and all the conferees went to the bank. But as they entered the president’s private office they were amazed.

Smiling blandly, though there was a wicked glint in his eyes, Marcus Bement sat across the table from the president.

“We requested a private interview, Mr. Townsend,” exclaimed Judge Hand.

“Never mind me, Judge; I am both the bank’s and Townsend’s counsel,” grinned the president of the Ranch Improvement Company. “What do you wish?”

“First of all,” and the jurist turned to the banker, “I wish you to cash this cheque for three thousand—”

“It is after hours,” hastily declared Bement.

“But the bank is open from seven till eight-thirty this evening. I can wait until then.”

“It is only open to *receive* money,” returned the banker.

“You mean there is not three thousand dollars in the vaults to pay me?” demanded Judge Hand, determined to make the “strong bluff.”

Covert as was the glance exchanged between the banker and the "boss," the jurist and several of the others noticed it and the Judge quickly turned to his friends:

"I had no idea the Ranchmen's National Bank was in financial straits. I advise you all to demand payment of your balances during banking hours this evening and, if you will take my 'tip' as a lawyer, none of you will pay any money into the bank until it is in proper hands."

"I never said there was not sufficient money to pay you, Judge," growled the banker.

"Then why refuse?"

"Because the bank does not pay out money except during the daytime hours!" snapped Bement. Then turning to his associate, he continued, "Townsend, before these men hold you up or rob your bank, I should have them ejected. There's old Sam Roberts, and I happen to know he is so hard pressed for eight thousand dollars that I doubt if he would stop at—"

"You will stop, though, Bement, and right where you are!" exclaimed Old Honesty, sternly, his eyes glowing with an expression so ominous that the arch-political "boss" paused abruptly. "*You* are not the man to call another a robber. You must remember that all these

gentlemen know about your blowing up the dam of your own company, of your obtaining my mortgage by some sort of threat over the president of the Curtis Savings Bank, and your forcing various bankers you control to call loans on men sounder financially than you are."

"That's not so, Sam Roberts, and you know it!" roared Bement.

"On the contrary, I can prove my statements. Furthermore, as Townsend knows you thoroughly, I imagine he might fear you as the robber more than me. Now, don't interrupt, Bement. Just listen to me. You will either advise Mr. Townsend to pay any cheques presented this evening, or take the consequences."

"You talk as though you and your family were not just the same as homeless," sneered the president of the Ranch Improvement Company. "Have you forgotten the mortgage I have in my pocket? I readily understand why you would like these men to receive their money; you think you could borrow the eight thousand."

"I have already arranged for that," smiled the ranchman.

"Where did you get the money? Beg it from your friends in Washington? You are a fine man to brag about 'independence.' You have

given me the best campaign material I could have. It will look well to the voters—you ranting about being free from any influence and then selling yourself to Hawk for a paltry eight thousand. Why, even Mason got more than that for one vote.”

“Stop!” said Old Honesty, leaning forward. “Though it is none of your business, I received, or shall receive, the money through one of the banks in Harker County.”

“Which one?” demanded the “boss.”

“Never mind. You are wandering from the issue. Mr. Townsend, will you pay the cheques to-night?”

“Suppose we—I mean Mr. Townsend, refuses?” fumed Bement.

“Then, as I said before, you must take the consequences.”

“What will they be?” asked the banker, nervously.

“Nonsense, Townsend, you are not going to let this cattleman ‘bluff’ you, are you?” snarled Bement.

“It is not ‘bluff,’ I assure you, Mr. Townsend.”

So full of meaning was the look given him by the political “boss,” however, that the banker said,

in a strained voice; "No cheques will be paid to-night, Roberts."

"Very well. I shall advise you not to call any more loans on my friends, however."

"The bank is quite able to manage its own affairs," retorted the banker, recovering his usual pompous maner.

"That is where you and the National Bank examiners disagree," commented Old Honesty, dryly. "At least, they looked upon every National Bank dominated by Marcus Bement or his 'tools' with suspicion last week—and I imagine their inspection to-morrow will not alter that opinion."

As the rugged ranchman spoke, his friends and enemies alike had heard him with amazement.

"You mean you will try to force me to pay some cheques your cronies may present this evening, contrary to the rules of the bank, so you may borrow the money to pay your mortgage, on the threat of summoning the bank examiner?" asked the banker, with assumed calmness.

"I made no such threat. The minute Marcus Bement set the day for the primary election, he started the examiners for Harker County. You see," and he turned to his friends, "the

banks have loaned more than the legal amount to Bement and his associates. Consequently, as it was thought he would need money to conduct the sort of campaign he runs, it was arranged that the examiners step in to prevent the honest depositors from being endangered. In the second place, I told you I had already arranged for the money to discharge the mortgage. And as I said, it comes from a bank in Harker County."

"You can talk 'big,' Roberts, but you can't back up your talk," sneered the president of the Ranch Improvement Company, seeking, by angering the ranchman, to learn of any other attack he might have in reserve. "Name the bank."

"I can't."

"Just as I thought," gloated Bement, and he turned to the others. "I am surprised you should have allowed yourselves to be fooled—"

"While I can't tell you the bank, I can tell you the man," Old Honesty said, quietly. "It is Lem Mason. He said he had ten thousand on deposit at Benton, and as I had stood by him when his supposed friends deserted him, he insisted on paying the mortgage."

"Never thought your own money would be

used against you, did you, Marcus?" chuckled Judge Hand.

The "boss," however, seemed not to hear, for no sooner had Benton been mentioned than he had seized the telephone and called for the Traders' National Bank there.

"Don't pay a cent to Lem Mason," he fairly yelled when the connection was given. . . . I don't care, I tell you the money was obtained by fraud. . . . What? He has received all but a hundred dollars? Ugh!" And he set the telephone down with a bang.

With a smile of triumph, Old Honesty turned to his companions:

"Let us go, gentlemen. I can see no reason for prolonging the interview."

In vain both Bement and the banker commanded, then pleaded, for further discussion, but the ranchman was obdurate, declaring that he preferred to transact any further business with the bank examiners.

"I'll give you an extension on your mortgage, Sam," exclaimed Bement, "if you will call off the examiners."

"Judge, doesn't that amount to offering a bribe?" asked the ranchman, a twinkle in his eyes.

Such mockery was there in his tone that the president of the Ranch Improvement Company danced up and down in his rage.

"I'll crush you! I'll drive you from Wyoming for that!" he roared.

"I quite agree the State is too small to hold us both, Bement. But I am not one of your hirelings who owe their freedom from jail to obeying your orders. When once I prove to the people of Harker County the exact sort of man you are, not even H. Chester Newcomb and his millions can save you."

"Who's that making so free with the name of H. Chester Newcomb?" demanded a tall, impressive-looking man, entering the private room without the preliminary ceremony of knocking.

At the sound of the strange voice, all the occupants of the room, who had been standing with their backs toward the door, turned quickly, Townsend's face showing indications of anger that the privacy of his office should have been violated.

As his eyes rested upon the interloper, however, his manner instantly changed.

"Why, Mr. Newcomb, when did you arrive in Sturgis?" he asked with a smile, stepping forward and extending his hand.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CAPITALIST PROVIDES SEVERAL SURPRISES

THE effect produced by the mention of the capitalist's name, whose agent in Harker County the natives were seeking to defeat, was interesting.

Dave and his father instinctively threw back their heads and squared their shoulders, as though preparing themselves to ward off a blow, while their friends sidled away from them, their faces showing consternation.

Alone of all those present, the president of the Ranch Improvement Company seemed to enjoy the situation. His eyes snapped with amused delight as he gazed from the head of the land-and water-grabbing syndicate to the men who had so short a time before held him in such an uncomfortable position. Then, in a suave tone, he exclaimed:

"Mr. Newcomb, let me make you acquainted with Samuel Roberts, and Judge Hand, of whom you have heard. These other gentlemen

are business men of Sturgis who have been hypnotized by the promises Roberts has been making to secure votes—" but with a gesture of impatience, the capitalist turned from Bement.

If the little group had been surprised by the unheralded arrival of the capitalist, they were dumbfounded by his action, which checked the words on Bement's lips.

No sooner had Old Honesty's name been mentioned than Mr. Newcomb strode forward, holding out his hand.

"I am certainly glad to meet you, Mr. Roberts," he declared, in a tone the sincerity of which there was no mistaking. "As a matter of fact, it was for the very purpose of getting acquainted with you that I have traveled from New York." And before his auditors could recover from their amazement, the capitalist added to it still further by saying, as he turned to the ranchman's son: "This, I suppose, from his youth and resemblance to you, is your son Dave. My boy, I congratulate you upon the manner in which you presented your father's case in Washington."

Though both Mr. Newcomb's attitude and voice were conciliatory to a degree, they did not break down the reserve into which the ranchman and his son had withdrawn, and an awkward si-

lence settled upon the actors in the unusual scene.

The capitalist, however, was not to be repulsed and, with a smile, he said:

"Evidently the two 'Honestys' have heard the ancient warning, 'Beware the Greeks bearing gifts.' But I assure you I am no Greek. I am actuated solely by the sincere desire to be friends with two men who are such splendid types of Americans—and besides, I always make it a point to keep on pleasant terms with my neighbours."

At this last statement, Dave and his father exchanged quick glances, while Bement and the others murmured their astonishment.

"Isn't it a rather far cry from New York to Deep Creek Valley?" asked Judge Hand, seeking to relieve the strain of the situation and to establish a truce, at least, until the capitalist should disclose his real purpose.

"It certainly would be stretching the bonds of neighbourhood quite a bit," smiled Mr. Newcomb. Then, pausing just long enough to give his words greater force, he continued: "Old Honesty and I are to be nearer neighbours than that—I have just leased McCord's ranch in Deep Creek Valley."

Varied were the exclamations that broke from both factions of the group at this surprising bit of information and the expression that appeared in the eyes of the owner of the Double Moon showed that he did not relish the thought of having the man who was the backbone of the ring he was fighting for a neighbour.

“Well, if Roberts isn’t civil enough or possessed of sufficient foresight to welcome the coming of so much money to this part of Wyoming, I surely am,” declared the president of the Ranch Improvement Company. “In behalf of the business men and property holders of Harker County, I extend you a cordial welcome, Mr. Newcomb.”

“Thank you,” murmured the capitalist in a tone so indifferent that even Bement could not fail to feel the rebuff and he stepped behind Townsend, flushing. And his discomfiture was still further increased by the New Yorker’s next words:

“Before I entered, I could not help hearing what you gentlemen were talking about, your words were not exactly spoken in whispers, you know,” he smiled. “I judge there is some difficulty about cashing some cheques,—lack of money, or something.

“Now I always make it a practice to carry a good deal of money with me and I have brought an unusually ample supply—that I might not find myself short to purchase all the stock, tools and things necessary for the ranch I came here to lease. Therefore, I should deem it a favor if you gentlemen who have been unable to receive accommodation from the bank would permit me to serve you. How much do the cheques amount to, Roberts, and whose are they?” And he looked questioningly from Old Honesty to the others.

During this speech, the feeling of distrust which had seized Old Honesty and his companions at the appearance upon the scene of action of the head of the syndicate became a conviction. Sorely were they puzzled to surmise the motives which had caused the New York millionaire to make the hurried trip more than half way across the continent and to lease a ranch along the disputed waterway of Deep Creek—but that he had some plan by which he expected to effect a coup they did not doubt.

Realizing, however, that it would not do to let the capitalist believe his unexpected arrival had frightened himself and his friends, Old Honesty replied:

“That matter has been all settled, thank you.

Under the circumstances," and he glanced significantly not only at Bement and the banker but at his own friends, "I do not think that it will be necessary for us to have the money. And now as I know you must be eager to talk over the matter of the dam and the Ranch Improvement Company with your agent, Marcus Bement, my friends and I will leave you."

"You should have been nicknamed 'Old Tartar' instead of 'Old Honesty,' Roberts," smiled the capitalist, determined not to be rebuffed by the ranchman. "As a matter of fact, I came here from New York on purpose to see and talk with you—and I don't intend to let your hostility to me or suspicions of my motives balk me, if I can prevent it.

"It certainly cannot do you any harm to confer with me, even your friend Judge Hand and your son Dave will admit that. Now, why not appoint some hour this evening which will suit your convenience, say half after seven?"

"What do you think, Dave?" asked the owner of the Double Moon, in evident perplexity.

"Of course, either Judge Hand or I may be present?" said the boy, turning toward the capitalist.

"Most assuredly," smiled Mr. Newcomb.

“Very well, I shall be awaiting you at Judge Hand’s house at seven-thirty this evening,” declared Old Honesty. And without giving the head of the syndicate the opportunity to say anything more, Roberts signaled to Dave and with a curt nod to Bement and Townsend, strode from the room, followed by his friends.

## CHAPTER XVI

### BEMENT'S RESOLVE

AS the group of men walked toward the jurist's house, Old Honesty beckoned Dave to his side and with him strode ahead of the others.

"What do you suppose is the reason for Mr. Newcomb's leasing the Cross and Circle, Dad?" asked the boy, voicing the question that had been in his mind ever since the capitalist's announcement.

"It probably has something to do with our injunctions concerning the use of the water in Deep Creek," replied the ranchman. "That, however, gives me less concern than the reasons for Newcomb's desiring an interview with me—I'm afraid that means trouble for us, son."

"But with the money provided to pay off the mortgage on the Double Moon, which Bement holds, I do not see how he can make very much trouble."

"Well, until we hear what Newcomb has to

say, we can only speculate as to his purpose—and that will not help us. I wish I had set the hour for the conference either earlier or later.”

“Why?”

“Because that would have given us time to ride back to the Double Moon and have an interview with Sandy. I know he hasn’t been any too friendly to us but I supposed that he realized it was to his interest to stand with us in this water matter. With all the ranchers along Deep Creek a unit, we could manage things all right. Now, however, with the man who is at the bottom of the whole attempted water grab a leaseholder along the creek, our ranks are broken—and Newcomb has influence and money enough to defy us.”

“Oh, well, I wouldn’t worry, Dad. Perhaps we are making a mountain out of a molehill, after all. Maybe Newcomb really means it when he says he wants to be friends with us. The President, at Washington, may have said something to him that has caused him to abandon his fight against us.”

“Possibly, but I doubt it. Men like Newcomb don’t accept defeat so easily, son. While they may appear to do so, they are in reality only biding their chance to turn the tables. I’d give a

good deal to know what inducement he offered to McCord."

"Then why not let me ride over to the Cross and Circle and find out?"

"Because I wish you to be present at the conference."

"But Black Bess can take me there and back before seven-thirty, or eight at the latest. It's only four now," added the boy, looking at his watch. "I shall have plenty of time, Dad. May I go?"

"Not now. We'll wait and talk with Newcomb, or rather hear what he has to say, and then the two of us will go."

"But Dad—"

"There's no use in arguing, son. I shall not let you go alone. I'm suspicious of every move Newcomb makes—and I firmly believe he calculated we would be so keen to learn from Sandy about the lease that you would ride over, in which case he probably arranged for some 'accident' to happen to you."

Realizing that it was hopeless to try to change his father's determination, Dave gave up the attempt and the short distance that separated them from the Judge's house was traversed in silence.

Upon their arrival, they waited on the steps until the others came up.

"Shall we have a conference?" asked the jurist.

"Better wait until we have heard Newcomb's proposition, whatever it is," opined the owner of the Double Moon. "His appearance upon the scene has put a different complexion on the case and if we try to talk before we know what he is driving at, we shall only be shooting at random."

"Just my idea, exactly," declared one of the business men. "Suppose we all agree to be at home this evening. After the interview, the Judge can telephone us and we'll come over."

"I don't know what Newcomb is up to, but there is nothing he can do that will change my attitude toward you, Sam. I'm with you now, since he has come, even more than I was before."

"Me, too; me, too," responded the others, more enthusiastically than grammatically.

"Much obliged," smiled the grim ranchman. "I reckon I'll need my friends now more than ever." And with a hearty hand clasp, Old Honesty parted from his companions and passed through the door which the jurist had opened.

"Come into the library where we can discuss this surprising new development," invited Judge

Hand, leading the way toward his study and den.

"I think if you don't mind that Dave and I will go to our room, instead, Hand. I haven't had my usual amount of rest lately and we may not be able to get much sleep to-night, so we'll take it while we have the chance."

"But, man, we ought to go over all the possibilities of the situation so that we may be prepared for any move of Newcomb's. 'Forewarned is forearmed,' you know."

"Very true—but it has always been my custom to follow the other old adage, 'Never cross a bridge until you come to it.' I don't see how Newcomb can cause very much trouble, except by putting the screws onto the men who control the banks."

"That is true—but why should he lease the Cross and Circle? That's where the 'joker' lies, in my opinion."

"That's just what I was telling Dave," declared the ranchman. "You are a lawyer, Hand. How can his holding a lease on Deep Creek Valley property affect the rights of the other owners?"

"I can't tell you, off hand. It is to decide the question that I wished to talk with you."

"But our injunction is permanent, isn't it?" interposed Dave.

"It certainly is."

"Then it can't be removed, can it?" pursued the boy.

"Not without a great deal of difficulty and then only for the most weighty reasons."

"In that case, I don't see where we have anything to worry about, Dad. By leasing the Cross and Circle, Newcomb will require the water from the Deep Creek to water his stock, so that he won't cut off the supply."

"Reckon you are right, son," asserted the owner of the Double Moon. "Anyhow, I'm going to believe you are until some one shows me differently. So Dave and I will take our rest after all, Judge." And without more ado, the ranchman mounted the stairs, followed by his son, and was soon stretched out upon the comfortable bed.

When Old Honesty and his friends had withdrawn from the private office of the bank president, Bement had recovered his composure.

"Well, Chester, you certainly owe me an explanation for the manner in which you 'squelched' me for Roberts' benefit," he declared, taking out a cigar, lighting it and dropping into a chair.

"What move have you up your sleeve that caused you to hike out here and drop in on us, unannounced?"

"Merely what I told Roberts. I came out to Deep Creek Valley to have a talk with him," returned the capitalist, coldly.

So distant were the tone and manner of the man for whom he had used his friends and influence that for several moments the president of the Ranch Improvement Company sat and blinked at him.

"If you are acting a part, Chester, there's no use in overdoing it," he finally said. "I've 'pulled off' too many tricks for you to have you try to come the high and mighty over me. So you—"

"You have the wrong idea, Bement," interrupted the head of the land- and water-grabbing syndicate. "If you stop to think a minute, you will realize that you have always been well paid for everything you have done for my associates, and you, yourself, ought to admit that you have bungled this water and dam business badly, to say the least.

"I did not, however, come to Wyoming to quarrel or wrangle with you. Indeed, I hoped I might have the good fortune to hold my con-

ference with Roberts and get away without running across you—,"

"Oh, come now, Newcomb—"

"Kindly not interrupt me. I have been fatigued by my trip and intend to go to the hotel and rest until my interview this evening. When that is ended, I shall start East again without delay. If I have anything to communicate to you, I shall do so, later.

"Townsend, if I were you, I wouldn't try to play too stiff a game with the men who are allying themselves with Old Honesty. From reports that have come to me—well, it won't do, that's all.

"And now I bid you gentlemen 'good afternoon.' "

In dismay, the "boss" of Harker County and his hireling, who served as president of the bank, watched the capitalist pass through the door and heard him depart from the bank building.

"Hadn't we—er—better quit, Marcus?" asked Townsend, fidgeting in his chair.

"Quit?" roared the "boss," leaping to his feet and striding up and down the room, his face purple with anger. "It will take more than H. Chester Newcomb and all his precious band of millionaire thieves to make *me* quit."

"He thinks he can throw me down, does he?" Bement continued, more to himself than to his companion. "Well, I'll just show him that he can't. I've served him in too many deals that wouldn't look well, if the truth were known. Why—"

"That's just it, you've *served* him, Marcus," interrupted the banker. "In other words, *you* have *done* the things and he and his associates have received the benefit, minus what you have deducted. Don't you suppose Newcomb knows you have feathered your own nest while serving him?"

"What if he does?"

"Simply that, knowing it, he feels under no obligation to you whatsoever."

For several minutes the man who ruled Har-ker County stood silent, then with a snarl, he exclaimed:

"There's just one way for me to get even with Newcomb, Townsend. I'll go in and win this election—and then if I don't make H. Chester Newcomb and his associates pay for some things they have done, my name isn't Marcus Bement!

"Townsend, from now on, you make it a point to put as many men under obligation to you as

you can. You can draw on my account in the Drovers' Bank, in Denver, for all the money you need. I simply must win the nomination—and election!”

## CHAPTER XVII

### DAVE'S RUSE

FROM his long training as a ranchman, Old Honesty had acquired the habit of snatching a wink of sleep whenever the opportunity presented. Consequently, it was only a few moments after he had stretched out upon the bed that he was sound asleep.

Dave, however, was wide awake. Despite his father's refusal to allow him to ride back to Deep Creek Valley, he nevertheless felt that it would put himself and his father in a much better position to talk with the head of the land- and water-grabbing syndicate were they to know the details of his dickering with the Scotchman which had resulted in Sandy's leasing the Cross and Circle.

Accordingly, he searched silently for some paper and when he found it, he wrote:

*"Dear Dad:*

*"We can talk better with N if we know about the facts of the lease. I have gone to learn them. I can make the*

Cross and Circle in an hour. If Sandy is there, or any of our friends, I shall not go to the Double Moon and should be back before seven-thirty. If I have to go there, I ought to be back by nine.

"Hastily,  
"DAVE."

Placing the note on his father's breast, that he might be sure to find it when he sat up, the boy tiptoed to the door, paused to make certain that his parent was still asleep, then, with infinite caution, opened the door, passed through it and as carefully closed it behind him.

Once in the hallway, however, Dave broke into a quick walk, his footsteps muffled by the heavy carpeting, and it was only a few minutes before he passed out of the house by a rear door and was in the stable.

Not long did it take him to saddle Black Bess and within ten minutes of the time when he had begun to write his note, the boy was galloping toward Deep Creek valley.

With eyes and ears alert for any possible prowlers who might be bent on mischief, Dave finally arrived without accident or incident at the yard of the Cross and Circle ranch house.

As he drew rein, however, he was amazed to see the door open and a tall, dark-haired girl,

dressed in the stylish manner he had so admired when in Washington, step forth and approach him.

While she was walking toward him, Dave thought that he had never seen a creature so beautiful and in his eyes shone the admiration he felt, a fact that the young woman noted with pleasure, for accustomed though she was to the homage of men of her rank and station, it gratified her to think that she could win the admiration of, as she deemed them, the ignorant plains people.

"You are the man the pater promised to send, I presume?" she said, with a tone of condescension.

Now while the son of the owner of the Double Moon had been watching the girl, he had readily decided that she could be none other than the daughter of the capitalist—and her question confirmed his opinion. But it suited Dave's purpose, as soon as he learned that she was in ignorance as to his identity, to play the ignoramus. Moreover, he was a bit piqued at the haughtiness of her bearing.

Accordingly, he blinked at her and then asked:  
"The what?"

With a little laugh, the girl said:

"Pardon me, I forgot that I was in the wild and woolly West. I meant are you the man my father, H. Chester Newcomb, promised to send to the ranch?"

"No, ma'am, I'm not, though I wisht I was," returned the boy, enjoying the rôle he was playing. Then he added, with a twinkle in his eyes, which, had the young woman not been so self-satisfied, might have warned her that she was being bantered: "I'm jest one of the wild and woolly Westerners."

"Well, you are a human being, anyway," replied the girl. "And even if you are a man and a stranger, I've always heard the plainsmen are very chivalrous. So, as I'm very lonesome and a little afraid, I should be very grateful if you would stay here, outside, of course, until the pater's man arrives."

"Aren't McCord or any of his men here?" asked Dave, keenly interested in her answer, despite his seeming indifference.

"No, er, that is, they are not right around here," she added, drawing back as though afraid of the splendid young chap to whom she had made the admission of her being unprotected.

"Nor any of your father's men?" pursued the boy.

"No."

Too clear an idea did the young rancher have of the opinion in which the capitalist held the plain, simple, outspoken Westerners not to know that only some very important matter could cause him to leave his daughter without any companion and what that cause was he determined to learn.

"Oh, you needn't be afeered of *me*, leddy," he smiled, in what he hoped was an ingratiating manner. "Most of us cow-punchers are the right sort—but I can't help sayin' it's a good thing I happened along instead of Injun Joe or Blackbeard. Now, you jest take my advice and keep within the house and no matter how many you hear riding by, or who comes to the door, don't you show yourself. 'Tain't likely many of the boys know as how Sandy's ranch is rented, so they won't stop and try to git acquainted. Jest do as I say and, like's not, nothing will happen to you till your daddy's man gits here."

Keenly the boy watched the effect of his words as he uttered them and, as he intended, they did anything but reassure the proud New Yorker.

"Oh, you're not going?" she cried, as Dave shook out his reins.

"Got to. I shouldn't have knowed there was

any one here, if you hadn't come out. I'm due thirty miles from here before sundown. But don't worry; you'll be all right—if you follow the advice I gave you."

Had Miss Newcomb not been so frightened, she might have noticed that there were suspicious lapses in Dave's attempt to talk and act like an uncouth cowboy, but she was too absorbed in her own fears to remark the discrepancies.

"You mustn't go! I can't be left alone! You look honest and, somehow, I feel that I should be perfectly safe with you, outside, of course. The pater will pay you any amount you ask for staying here." And then as she discerned that her appeal and the offer of money had not persuaded the supposed plainsman, she added: "Besides, it may not be very long before the other man comes. So it may make you only a little late—and I'm sure, if you only knew who I was, you would be only too glad to render an assistance to H. Chester Newcomb's daughter. Why, I know men that would actually *pay* money for the opportunity, instead of asking it. So—"

"I haven't asked any money," interrupted Dave so quietly and in such a tone that the girl paused and glanced at him curiously. Noting

this, the boy added, in his former gruffness: "I reckon an hour or so won't make no great difference to me."

"Oh, thank you so much. You probably know what to do with your horse and when the pater's man comes, you may go." And, turning, she started to return to the house.

To be left before he had obtained any information, however, did not suit the boy's purpose and, quickly slipping the rein over his arm, he walked beside the girl toward the house.

"How long you been here?" he asked.

"We arrived this morning."

"H'm, pretty quick work, getting here this morning and leasing the Cross and Circle before afternoon. How'd you happen to find the only man along the Deep Creek who would do such a thing?"

Miss Newcomb, however, did not intend to be drawn into any conversation with a mere cowboy and walked along as though she were oblivious of his very presence. Already more than half the distance to the door of the ranch house had been traversed and Dave realized that if he were to succeed in his determination, he must try some other tack. Accordingly, stopping suddenly and eying the girl with suspicion, he exclaimed:

"Now I wonder if you've really hired the ranch? It don't seem like Sandy to let any one in here, especially on such short notice. I seen him only this morning and he didn't say anything about your coming. Stampeding cattle! I wonder if you can be one of the cow rustlin' gang that's been working Harker County? They say there's a leddy ridin' with 'em." And the boy stood and surveyed the girl from head to foot, all his former admiration gone.

What a cow rustler was, Miss Newcomb had no idea, but the tone in which her companion spoke and the change in the manner in which he regarded her caused her to realize that she had become an object of suspicion and, though it hurt her pride so to do, she knew that she must allay his sudden distrust.

"My father learned about Mr. McCord before we came out here," she said.

"H'm, that don't seem likely, leddy. We-all know Sandy pretty well and none of us ever heard him speak of having any friends in the East."

"You doubt my word?"

"Cow rustlers has to be pretty smart," commented Dave.

"What are cow rustlers?"

"It's another word for cattle thieves."

"Gracious! You think I belong to a band of cattle thieves? Why, they—they shoot or hang them out here, don't they? At least, I've read they did."

"They sure do," asserted the boy, emphatically.

"And you think I am one?"

"Suppose you tell me all about your being here—and then I can judge better."

As he made this bold proposition, the young rancher watched the girl anxiously.

"Well, though the Newcombs are not accustomed to giving explanations, as I am in your power, I suppose it would be best.

"Father knew your former Congressman, Mr. Mason, in Washington. From him, he learned all about the people out in Deep Creek Valley. When the trouble came up over the water, father decided to come out here and hire a ranch. As a property owner, he would be in a position to do things he couldn't otherwise. He spoke to Mr. Mason about it and he said Mr. McCord was the only possible one who would do it and he doubted if he would. Father wrote, however, and it was arranged. So we came to-day. Does that satisfy you?"

"It explains some of Sandy's actions," returned Dave, more to himself than to the girl.

"I thought you looked like an honest person," smiled the girl, believing she had carried her point—but her companion's next words caused her assurance to vanish.

"If that's true," he said, "where are Sandy and all your men folks? Surely, your father didn't expect to work the Cross and Circle with just himself and you? Why, there's more than four thousand head of Cross and Circle cattle down on the Double Moon."

"We don't expect to raise cattle here."

"What then, nothin'?"

"Sheep."

"She-e-ep!" gasped Dave, in long-drawnout amazement, his mind revolting, with the cattleman's hatred of the animals, at the thought of sheep grazing in Deep Creek Valley.

"Yes, sheep. And that's where the men all are. Father has seven carloads coming and the men have gone to meet them and drive them in."

"They'll have some job gettin' sheep into this valley, I'm thinkin'," grinned the boy. "There are five ranches to pass from Curtis before reaching the Cross and Circle and there ain't a man

on them that don't hate sheep worse than cattle rustlers."

"That's just what Mr. McCord told the pater. After they had discussed the matter, Mr. McCord and his men rode over to Thornbrook so they could drive them in through the Buffalo Pass and get them here before the other ranchers could learn about them."

"I see. I suppose your father sent word for the change in routing from Sturgis. H'm, having to go by Thornbrook will take anyhow twelve hours longer."

"So Mr. McCord said." Then, realizing that the stranger seemed to know of her father's whereabouts, she asked: "How did you know Mr. Newcomb was in Sturgis?"

"Saw him there," returned Dave.

A look of surprise appeared in the eyes of the young woman at this bit of information and she was on the point of expressing it when the boy, looking toward Sturgis, beheld a horseman galloping toward them.

"Must be the man your father was to send," declared Dave.

"Oh, I hope it is—er, I mean I am glad you have not been delayed longer."

"Is there any way you can make sure?"

“Why, yes; I have some field glasses in the house.”

“Then get them,” ordered the boy, adding, as an inducement, “it may be someone looking for the rustlers.”

Quickly the girl gathered her skirts and sped into the house, returning in a moment with the binoculars, which she extended to Dave.

“You look,” she begged. “You know all the people hereabouts.”

Eagerly the boy took the glasses, focused them and then gazed at the approaching horseman.

“No one I know,” he announced, removing them from his eyes. “You look; it may be some of your father’s men.”

“It is, it is, it’s Matthew!” exclaimed the young woman, delightedly.

“Then there is no use of my remaining here any longer,” declared Dave, and without more ceremony, he leaped into the saddle on Black Bess and dashed away toward the Double Moon, leaving a much-perplexed girl staring after him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NEWCOMB YIELDS

**A**S the young rancher raced over the ground, his fury at the thought of the grazing ground of Deep Creek Valley being defiled by sheep found vent in wild exclamations. For a moment, he was ashamed of the manner in which he had duped the daughter of the millionaire, but he had been determined to learn the facts in regard to the leasing of the Cross and Circle and now that he knew them, he felt that he had been justified.

Accustomed to think quickly, as soon as he was told that McCord and the men had gone to Thornbrook to drive in the detested sheep, Dave had decided upon his course. Moreover, despite Miss Newcomb's statement that Sandy had accompanied the herders, the boy was sufficiently acquainted with the Scotchman to believe that he would find some excuse to leave them and return to the valley that, when the wrath of the other ranch owners descended on him for allow-

ing sheep to be brought into the region, he could partially clear his skirts by declaring he did not know Newcomb intended to raise sheep. But with the information the girl had given him, he would be able to refute the denial.

"If I can only find Happy Jack, or some of the other boys at the Double Moon!" sighed Dave, as he galloped.

Lather was dripping from Black Bess as the boy raced into the yard of the ranch nearest to the Cross and Circle. With a single movement, he threw the bridle over her head and leaped from his saddle. Finding the door locked, Dave ran round to the back of the house, forced one of the windows and crawled through, going direct to the telephone, where he rang up the Double Moon.

"Who's this?" he demanded, as he received a response. "You, Polly, eh? That's good. Yes, this is Dave. Sure, I'm all right. Now don't bother with questions, I'm in an awful hurry. Is Happy Jack there? What? Just riding out of the yard. Then call him back. It's important. Yes, I'll hold the line."

Thanking his stars he had arrived in time to catch the foreman of his father's ranch, Dave

heard Polly shout to the cowboy and soon heard his steps as he hastened to the telephone.

"This is Happy," called the voice through the instrument. "What's up, Dave?"

"Plenty. Now just listen to what I say and then mind you do as I tell you; I'll take the consequences. Who's that I can hear yelling outside?"

"That's McCord."

"Get him, Happy, get him! Don't let him leave; we need him! We must have him, do you hear?"

The cowboy, however, had dropped the receiver at his young master's first words and was dashing out of the house after the ranch owner ere Dave had finished his excited plea.

McCord, though, had seen Happy Jack as he emerged and, with guilty conscience surmising that in some way his treachery to the other ranchmen along Deep Creek had been discovered, had clapped spurs to his pony and was racing like mad away from the ranch.

Several of the other Double Moon punchers were in the yard, having been on the point of riding away with the foreman when the latter had been summoned so suddenly to the telephone,

and as he caught sight of them, Happy Jack yelled:

"Get Sandy, if you have to shoot the horse from under him!"

Even as he uttered the startling command, the foreman vaulted into his saddle and soon half a dozen cowboys were in full cry after the hard-riding Scotchman.

In breathless suspense, Dave had heard the shouts outside the Double Moon ranch house and, eager to know their cause, was yelling at the top of his lungs through the dead instrument, but though he made a prodigious noise, so intent were Polly and the others in watching the pursuit of the ranchman that they paid him no heed.

For a few minutes, McCord held his own with his pursuers, then Happy Jack began to gain on him, but though the latter closed in until he was within about four yards, he could gain no more.

Half a mile the men ran thus, and then Happy, determined to end the chase, uncoiled his riata, swung it about his head and let it fly.

Straight and true, the noose sped, settling down over the shoulders of the Scotchman.

Instantly, Happy's pony, trained to the work, threw herself back on her haunches and Sandy was jerked from his saddle.

"You let me go! You'll pay dear for this!" roared the Scotchman, as the foreman drew him in.

"Just dry up on the lingo and get on your feet, Sandy," admonished the cowboy.

But the owner of the Cross and Circle refused to rise to his feet.

By this time, the other punchers had reached the scene and, at a nod from the foreman, two of them leaped from their saddles, seized the ranchman and placed him, struggling and kicking, behind Happy Jack.

"Just put your guns into his back and keep him quiet," commanded the foreman, and in this manner they returned to the ranch house.

"What do you want me for?" demanded McCord, after a few minutes.

"Don't know yet," returned Happy Jack.

At this laconic reply, the ranchman flew into a tantrum, threatening the boys with all sorts of dire punishment, until the foreman exclaimed:

"Dave said to get you, and that was enough for me. You know why he should want you better than I do, so keep quiet."

When at last she saw that the cowboys had been successful in their race, Polly returned to

the telephone and told the facts to the boy, who had been calling so frantically.

"Won't you tell me what the trouble is, Dave?" she pleaded.

"Surely," replied the boy, "now that we've got Sandy. He has leased his ranch to Newcomb and the men are on the way to meet seven carloads of sheep."

"Sheep?" shrilled the girl in amazement, and her voice reached the troop just riding up with their captive.

As he heard the ominous word, McCord quaked, a move which several of the punchers plainly saw.

"What have you been doing with sheep, Sandy?" demanded one of them.

But he was saved a reply by Happy Jack's saying:

"Don't talk to the old curmudgeon. Just mind all he says, though. I'll find out from Dave in a twinkling what he's been up to; the old duffer wouldn't tell the truth, anyway. Look sharp, now, that he doesn't give you the slip." And entrusting the safety of the prisoner to his men, the foreman slipped from his saddle, entered the house and took the receiver from Polly.

“Got Sandy, Dave; now what?” he shouted.

“I’m up here at the ranch next the Cross and Circle,” said the boy. “Sandy has played us mean. Rented his ranch for a sheep pasture. Seven carloads coming in to Thornbrook, to-night.

“Keep quiet, Happy. You can talk afterwards,” warned the young rancher, as the foreman’s wrath at the information prevented his speaking. “You’ll bring Sandy up here with you. Have the other boys along too. I’ll take Sandy into Sturgis with me. The rest of you will ride into Thornbrook and watch those sheep cars.

“I don’t think they’ll be unloaded. If they are, just pass the word about that Newcomb, the man at the bottom of all our water trouble, intends to put sheep on McCord’s ranch. I think the boys along the route will help you. I am sure father would not wish any of the sheep to come through Buffalo Pass. You understand, eh? All right. Be careful and don’t hurt any of the sheep, abuse them, I mean. What, it will be a longer way for you to come up to me and Polly says she can bring Sandy? All right. I don’t care who does it, so long as you boys get onto the job and I receive Sandy. Be sure you

tie him up good and strong, though, so he can't give Polly the slip. Good-by and good luck. Oh, when you get to Thornbrook, go to the freight office; father will send instructions there for you. So long."

Before this conversation was ended, the young girl was on her pony, and after Happy Jack had tightened all the bonds holding the Scotchman, he tied his horse to her saddle and she started, accompanied for several miles by the punchers, who found rare enjoyment in telling the Scotchman their opinion of him for trying to play them such a trick and it was with genuine relief that he saw them take their departure for the Thornbrook trail.

As the cowboys rode away, Polly pointed significantly to the holsters she was wearing.

"Don't try any funny business with me, Sandy," she admonished. "These things aren't for show—and you've seen me shoot the spots off of playing cards too often not to know that I can use them. Be sure if you make any attempt to escape, I will use them."

The warning had its effect. Though he was furious at his predicament, the owner of the Cross and Circle made no attempt to get away and in due course they were joined by Dave, who

had ridden out to meet them, fearing that perhaps the girl might have trouble with her captive.

When the boy joined them, the Scotchman had expected that he would be the target for more upbraiding, but with a nod to Polly, Dave reined in alongside and the two talked as unconcernedly as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, and never was his name or the coming of the sheep mentioned, and Sandy felt the oversight more than he would a furious tirade.

As it was dusk, Dave felt that it would do no harm to ride past the house where Miss Newcomb was, for he was confident that neither she nor her servant would be able to see them, or if they did, would recognize them.

Before they came in sight of the house, however, they were startled by a piercing shriek.

"What can that be?" gasped Polly.

Without waiting to reply, Dave turned to the Scotchman.

"That sounded like trouble, Sandy. Furthermore, it came from the direction of your ranch house. I can't leave Polly out here with you at this time of night when things may be going on about which we don't know. So you'll just ride your pony as hard as you can—and mind you

don't make us wait for you." And without more ado, the young rancher reined Black Bess to the side away from Polly, seized the bridle of the Scotchman's horse and dashed for the direction whence the cry had come.

From time to time, as they rode, they could hear other shouts but they were growing weaker.

"Please ride ahead, Dave. I'm afraid something has happened to that young lady," pleaded Polly, at last.

Already the outline of the house could be distinguished; there was no sign of a light, and the young rancher deemed it safe to leave the girl with their prisoner. Accordingly, he shook out Black Bess and leaped forward in the increasing darkness.

Slipping from his saddle in front of the house, Dave tried the door, only to find it locked.

Bracing his shoulder against it, he forced it in, but in the darkness he could see nothing. Thoroughly familiar with the inside of the house, however, it was but the work of a moment for him to find the wall lamp and light it.

As the flare illumined the room, he heard a groan and, turning, beheld Miss Newcomb, backed into a corner, feebly shuffling a chair in front of her, while a few feet away stood the

man she had hailed as Matthew, frenzied with liquor.

With a leap, Dave was upon him and his strong young arms were no match for the other. It was but the work of a second to throw him to the floor and but of a short time longer to bind him, hand and foot.

Just as he rose from the task, the girl, recognizing in him the man with whom she had talked in the afternoon, swooned. And when she awoke, Polly was ministering to her.

"Can you ride?" asked Dave, as Miss Newcomb recovered more and more of her composure.

"I-I think so."

"Good. I'm sorry to ask it but it is necessary that I should get to Sturgis without delay. Obviously, I cannot leave you and Miss Mason here, so you must come with me."

"But I have no horse," pleaded the girl.

"You can take mine and I will ride behind Dave," exclaimed Polly.

And without more ado, they set out.

Though they made all the haste possible, it was well on toward nine o'clock when the strange troop arrived at Judge Hand's house.

Bidding the groom fetch Mrs. Hand and not

disturb the Judge or the others, Dave waited in the stable and when the jurist's wife arrived, quickly gave her an outline of the facts and then, entrusting Sandy to the charge of the groom with instructions to hold him in a room near the library, the boy made his way to the Judge's study.

The sound of excited voices was plainly audible as he approached.

"Those are my terms, Roberts," Newcomb was saying. "Either you will withdraw from the contest or I shall ruin every ranchman in Deep Creek Valley."

Never pausing to rap, Dave entered.

"Where have you been, son?" demanded his father. "I have been worrying about you."

"I've been learning how Mr. Newcomb bought up Sandy and how he plans to 'ruin the ranchmen in Deep Creek Valley,' " he replied. "But I don't think you will do it, Mr. Newcomb."

"Why not, pray?" sneered the capitalist.

"Because your sheep will never reach Deep Creek Valley!"

"Sheep in Deep Creek Valley?" demanded Mr. Roberts, leaping to his feet.

"Exactly, Dad. But I have sent Happy Jack and the boys to Thornbrook to meet them.

Sandy has been corresponding with Mr. Newcomb—that's why he has been so stand-offish with us."

"Nonsense, mere childish prattle," fumed the millionaire.

"Just wait a minute and I think you will change your mind," smiled the young rancher and, turning, he abruptly left the room, reëntering in a few minutes, leading the still bound McCord.

"I'm sorry I did it, Sam," whined the Scotchman. "Mr. Newcomb, you can have your money back as soon as I can get it from the bank in the morning. I'll pay all your expenses, besides—but you can't lease the Cross and Circle to herd sheep."

"I won't take the money and I'll raise whatever I please on the land I have leased," stormed the millionaire. "I have the lease in my pocket. You can't get out of that."

"Sandy, Sandy," interrupted Old Honesty, "why did you do it? I know Newcomb well enough to know that he will not give up the lease, as he says. Do you know that the only way we can save our herds of cattle and Deep Creek Valley from a desperate sheep and cattlemen's war—and Newcomb can hire ten men to

our one—is for me to withdraw as candidate? Sandy, man, why did you do it?"

Even the capitalist was moved by the tones in which the owner of the Double Moon spoke, but he was sufficiently acquainted with Old Honesty's character to realize that he would give up his fight for Congress in order to save his fellow ranchers and, with victory in sight, he was determined not to yield.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Sam," declared the Scotchman. "Just let Newcomb learn what Dave did for his daughter and if he don't crawl round and offer to eat out of your hand, I'm mistaken. Why, he'll—"

"My daughter?" interrupted Newcomb, his face white. "What about her? What has happened to her? Where is she? Speak, can't you, you young fool—or you old Scotchman?"

"Mrs. Hand is now caring for her," replied Dave, quietly. "As soon as it is all right, she will send for you."

"It won't be necessary. Here I am, Pater," cried the capitalist's daughter, bursting into the room and throwing herself into her father's arms, where she sobbed out the story of her desperate battle of ten minutes against their former servant.

“And you rescued my daughter, after knowing my plans to ruin your father and you?” asked the millionaire of Dave, when he had heard the story.

“Surely. *We* don’t wage conflict against women,” returned the boy, simply.

“Roberts, McCord is right. I’ll do anything you ask.”

“Then please send word to the freight agent at Thornbrook to have the sheep shipped back where you bought them,” exclaimed Dave. “The boys will be there in a few minutes—and we do not wish any trouble.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### DAVE FINDS A FRIEND

QUICKLY Mr. Newcomb did as the boy requested, and when the orders had been received at Thornbrook, he turned and assured Old Honesty that he would give back the lease to the owner of the Cross and Circle, promising, moreover, that he would take no further part in the attempt to defeat his candidacy.

His mission ended and finding that his daughter was suffering from nothing worse than shock, the millionaire arranged to return East in his private car during the night, first, however, sending the sheriff to the ranch house for his former servant, to whom swift justice was assured by Old Honesty and his friends.

When the Newcombs had departed from the house, Judge Hand telephoned to the men who had been at the afternoon conference and, after being acquainted with the amazing incidents of the evening, they went into discussion of the campaign plans.

"Sam, how much of what you told Bement was 'bluff' and how much fact?" asked one.

"There was no 'bluff,' just a 'straight talk.' "

"Won't the coming of the examiners start a run on the bank?"

"Not if there is no 'crooked' work."

"But suppose some is found?"

"In that case, it would seem to me better that the bank should be in the hands of honest men before Bement and his friends are able to steal *all* the funds."

"So this is part of what you learned when you spent your last day in Washington with Senator Hawk, eh?" hazarded the jurist. His only answer being an inscrutable smile, he continued, "you have certainly succeeded in scaring Bement and Townsend. I fancy they will seek us out and literally beg us to take our money."

"If they do, I hope you all will refuse it. There will be no more loans called by the banks controlled by Bement and Newcomb. From now on, I reckon Bement will depend upon the power of his political 'machine' to defeat me. Where am I to speak to-night, Hand?"

"Too bad Bement controls all the county's newspapers; this story would make entertaining reading," declared Perry.

"It can't be helped," commented Judge Hand. "Through the county and other advertising, Bement controls the press as effectually as he does the banks."

"Surely, there must be some independent newspapers, Judge," protested Dave.

"Possibly, but not in the country. It means bread and butter to a country newspaper to support the party in power."

"But the other party may come into power."

"It is the old story of the bird in the hand being worth two in the bush, my boy. Patronage is the curse of politics. Votes of whole families are ruled by the 'boss,' who can say, 'Vote for so and so or you lose your job or contract.' Naturally, a voter does not wish to have a brother, father, sister or mother, uncle or aunt, or even a cousin, deprived of work, and he usually casts his ballot for the man who will favour his family.

"That is why a man in high office can use his patronage to prevent another person, possibly the people's preference, from obtaining a nomination. The man in office not only controls the votes of the man he appoints, but their families as well. In the mills and railroads, word is passed by the foremen as to whom the

owners wish elected. As I said before, it being easier to control a few score men than hundreds of thousands, the 'bosses' are fighting desperately to maintain the old 'pledged delegate' system and to prevent the adoption of direct primaries."

"Would it injure Dad if we could get a paper to support him?" asked Dave.

"Indeed, no. Bement's papers will not even mention your father, I'm afraid. Probably in some of the outlying sections, the voters will not know he is the opposition candidate until they have pledged themselves to Bement."

Dave was about to ask more questions, when his father shook his head at him, and though the boy kept silence, he told himself that the jurist was mistaken then, as the rest became absorbed in discussing other phases of the campaign, he picked up his hat and left the room, determined to make a round of the newspaper offices in the hope that he might prove the Judge had been mistaken.

Remembering Black Bess and Brimfire as he caught sight of the jurist's stable, the young ranchman turned toward it to make sure the ponies were comfortable, and as he approached, he became aware of someone near him.

Dropping to the ground, he peered through the darkness in the direction in which he had "sensed" the intruder.

Accustomed as his eyes were, from long experience on the range, to pick out forms in the night, it was only a few seconds before Dave discovered something moving back and forth below the two windows which belonged to the library, where his father and friends were in conference.

Fearing that the president of the Ranch Improvement Company, in his desperation, had decided upon putting his rival out of the way, Dave dropped his hand to the pocket in which Polly had put her pistol, to make sure of its presence, then crawled toward the man whose actions were so suspicious.

Closer and closer he drew until only a few feet separated them, then cautiously he rose to his feet and crouched for the spring which should carry him upon the prowler.

Ere he launched himself, however, the other clutched a trellis below one of the windows and began to mount.

With a leap, Dave was upon him, one hand grasping the collar of his coat, the other covering his mouth to prevent an outcry.

An instant the captive struggled, then, realizing how completely he was overpowered, became quiet.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the young ranchman, in a low, excited voice.

"Let me go and—I'll—tell—you," the other managed to gasp.

"Promise not to run away?" and the boy gave a twist to the collar as a reminder of his strength.

"I promise."

"Then come with me," and Dave led his captive around the corner of the house and toward the stable from which the night lamp glowed.

Coming within its rays, captor and captive looked at one another closely.

"If it isn't Dave Roberts!" exclaimed the one, while the other was amazed to see a chap no older than himself.

"You may know me, but I have never seen you before," said the young ranchman. "Who are you?"

"Charlie Porter."

The name conveying nothing to Dave, he asked: "Why are you prowling about Judge Hand's house and climbing up to one of the windows?"

"That's easy—I wanted to hear what your father and the rest were talking about."

"Why?"

"I'm a reporter."

"A reporter?" repeated Dave, in amazed delight to think that he had stumbled in such an unusual manner upon the very sort of person he had left the conference to find. "Why didn't you go to the door, instead of acting like a burglar?"

"I did—three times, but the servant said the Judge was busy and could not be disturbed."

"H'm, does Marcus Bement control the paper you represent?"

"Not much. Bement has no greater enemy than the *World*."

"How do you know?"

"My father owns and publishes the *World*."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Why?"

"Answer me," and Dave again seized Porter's collar and gave it a suggestive twitch.

"I am. If you don't believe me, you can ask father."

"If you are not one of Bement's friends why did you want to hear what they are talking about in the library?"

"So we could print the story. Say, it must be a 'dandy,'" the boy added, forgetting his predicament in his enthusiasm for his work. "Father was passing the bank when he saw Marc and Townsend come out and go over to the Park Hotel. Marc was furious. Father followed, heard him rave about your Dad, saw him write a message to Bowker, in Benton, and then order three rooms at the hotel. Then he rushed back to the office and sent me up to talk with the Judge. When that fool servant refused to let me in, I looked around until I located the room in which they were having the conference—and you know the rest."

"H'm," mused Dave. "If the *World* has split with Bement, I should think your father would have come to see Judge Hand himself."

"He was afraid to."

"Why?"

"Well, Marc doesn't know that father is through with him. You see, father is waiting for the chance to hit him hard when he announces the break. It struck him this was the chance."

"I rather think it is," smiled Dave.

"Then you'll take me into the conference?"

"Not now. I think I will go to see your father. After I talk with him, we'll see."

“Then come on, there’s no time to be lost,” exclaimed young Porter, seizing Dave by the arm and hurrying him to the street.

Arrived at the newspaper office, the young ranchman was quickly introduced to the owner, and after Charlie had related his experience, Dave began:

“Your son tells me you have split with Bement, Mr. Porter?”

“Yes.”

“And that you are eager to support my father?”

“I—yes.”

“What proof have I?”

“Isn’t my word sufficient?” demanded the editor, testily.

“I meant no offence, Mr. Porter. Though I am young, I am not so foolish as to accept the announcement of your break with Marcus Bement without proof. Practical politicians seem to think only of the ends, not the means. Bement would give a great deal to know our plans, and it looks queer to me that a man who has been so intimate with him should suddenly seem so keen to support my father.”

“You are quite right, Dave,” replied the editor after several minutes of silence. “If you will

give me your word not to repeat what I tell you, I will try to convince you that I am eager to 'break' Marcus Bement."

"I promise, sir."

"Good. When I started the *World* in Sturgis, I had a very hard time until Bement offered me the county advertising in return for my support of Lem Mason for Congress.

"I gave it. The advertising came to me and I began to prosper. You may, or may not, know that I have a daughter, May. Bement has a son, Harry, who was employed by H. Chester Newcomb, in New York. Bement suggested a marriage. Believing it a splendid opportunity for my daughter, I consented. The wedding occurred and the young people went to New York. That was a year ago. Yesterday, I received a letter from May saying that young Bement had deserted her, leaving her penniless, three months ago. Proud, she tried to find work and support herself. Now she is in a hospital, ill and without friends, without money. I appealed to Bement. He said he had disinherited his son and refused to do anything. Beside myself with anger, I threatened to expose him. He laughed. This morning the Curtis Savings Bank sent notice of foreclosure of a mortgage

on my printing plant. Now do you understand my change of feeling toward Bement?”

“I think I do, Mr. Porter, still—”

“Here is the letter. Read it.”

The sight of the missive, which he had wished to look at yet hesitated to ask for, dispelled all remaining doubt in the boy's mind, and fully and forcefully he related the circumstances of his father's candidacy, detailing, in response to the editor's questions, the story of the dam and Bement's subsequent actions through the banks.

As the story of political chicanery was completed, Mr. Porter grasped Dave by the hand.

“To-morrow, when the *World* is delivered through Harker County, will be one of the happiest days in my life,” he said. “The happiest will be when Marcus Bement is shorn of his power and my daughter can return to my roof without fear of harm from him or his men.”

## CHAPTER XX

### A STRENUOUS RALLY

**A**MAZED at this further evidence of Bement's heartlessness, Dave could think of no words properly to express his sympathy, so he gave the editor's hand a friendly clasp and turned to leave the office.

"Charlie, run along with Roberts," ordered Mr. Porter.

"No need to trouble," interrupted Dave. "I reckon I can find my way back."

"Why is it that you and your father must always have the truth?" smiled the editor. "The reason I told Charlie to go with you was so that no—er—harm should befall you."

"But this is Sturgis, not the plains," returned the young ranchman. Besides, only two or three people know me here."

"Don't be too sure of that," interposed Charlie. "I recognized you as soon as I saw your face under the light. So you see people may recognize you when you do not know them."

“That’s perfectly true, Dave,” declared the elder Porter. “There is no sense in you and your father ignoring the danger you both are in. Bement has taken good care that plenty of his hirelings should see you—I’ll warrant that from my knowledge of his methods—and he is fast becoming desperate.”

Not until he heard these words did the young ranchman recall the Judge’s speech in Curtis, in which he declared that in accepting the candidacy, Old Honesty was courting danger to himself and family, and as they recurred to him, he made no further objection to the companionship of the young reporter.

The story related by the editor had established a bond between the boys and, as they walked along, they talked as freely as though they were chums.

Thus it was that Charlie learned of Dave’s trip to Boniface and Palfrey, though not of the real purpose.

“Jove, that will make a great story for the *World*,” exclaimed the young reporter, enthusiastically. “I’ll ask father to let me go with you, that is, if you would like to have me,” he added.

Despite the circumstances of their meeting,

the young ranchman had taken a liking to the reporter, and the thought of having a companion on the trip to the border towns was very welcome, for he had come to look upon the project with many misgivings, in consequence of the repeated hints of the danger threatening himself and his father.

“You wouldn’t run from trouble, if it came?” asked Dave, in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could muster.

“Trouble, what do you mean?” returned the reporter.

“I don’t know, exactly—anyhow, I shall not tell you anything more until you find out whether or not your father will let you go with me.”

“Do Hand and your father know about it?”

“No.”

“Ph-e-ew!” ejaculated Charlie. “You know there will be some sort of a fracas, either in Boniface or Palfrey, or both—now don’t try to tell me there won’t—and yet you keep it to yourself and are willing to go to two of the ‘toughest’ towns in Wyoming without a whimper. You’re the kind I like, Dave. If father does not give his permission, I will—”

Arrival at the house of Judge Hand, just as the candidate and his friends were coming out, put an end to the boys' conversation and they joined the men, Charlie discreetly keeping in the background.

"Where have you been, Dave?" asked his father.

"Oh, just for a stroll."

"Well, don't leave me again without telling me where you are going. I might need you. We are on our way to the rallies."

As the company started once more, Dave gradually dropped back until he and Charlie were together and side by side they attended the meetings.

Not many were there in the first corner crowd Old Honesty addressed, but as the tour progressed and report of the ranchman's speaking spread, the numbers increased rapidly. Though most of the auditors listened attentively, cheering the telling thrusts at the "boss" of Har-ker County, there were an ever-growing series of interruptions and the "heckling" became more and more persistent.

"Bement has ordered his gang to break up the meetings," whispered the young reporter to Dave, after a particularly hostile demonstra-

tion. "Let's work in among the crowd and try to spot some of them."

Readily the young ranchman assented, for the repeated disturbances had aroused his ire, and he kept close to his new-found friend as he squirmed in and out among the people.

The candidate had just finished his portrayal of "strangle-hold" which Bement had upon business in Harker County, when a voice shouted:

"How much do they pay you to lie about Bement and Newcomb?"

"No man can buy my influence or opinion, sir," retorted Old Honesty. "I am simply stating the facts—anyone can prove them. My friends would not pay one solitary cent to—"

"They can't. They haven't any money," interrupted another voice.

"You are mistaken, though it is not Bement's fault they are not penniless. As soon as he learned a man of prominence had rallied to my support, this 'boss' ordered his bank to call loans on him, in the hope of scaring my friend, and all whom he employs, so that he would desert me. Bement realizes the only way he can prevent people who desire honesty and publicity in

politics from voting for me is by threatening them with ruin in business or loss of work.

"You say Bement controls the banks in Har-ker County?" demanded a voice.

"I do."

"Prove it."

"Since this morning, his banks have called loans on four of my friends and he refused to pay money on deposit to another, right here in Sturgis."

"Then the bank is short of money?" yelled the same voice.

"Be careful what you say, sir," warned Old Honesty. "It is a crime to start a rumour affecting the soundness of a bank. I simply mentioned the matter of the loans to prove that it is *my* friends who are called upon to pay while those who favour Bement are not troubled."

"That's a—"

Ere the sentence could be finished, the excited assemblage was amazed to see two young fellows seize the "heckler."

"Officer, Jerry, come here and arrest Pat Hurley!" shouted one of them, who was the young reporter. "There's a reward on him for robbing the Boniface postoffice last March."

Instantly the two boys and their captive be-

came the centre of a howling, struggling throng, some of whom sought to liberate the robber, others to help hold him.

Fortunately for Dave and Charlie, the policeman attending the candidate had recognized the young reporter's voice and, wielding his club right and left, had leaped to the boys' assistance, while Old Honesty tried to follow.

"You mustn't go into that mob, Sam," cried Judge Hand, grabbing the candidate's arm.

"But Dave is with that young fellow. I have been watching them as they went in and out among the crowd."

"Dave will take care of himself. If you go in there, it will give Bement's men, who are evidently bent on mischief, too good an opportunity to 'get you.'"

Before the candidate could offer further objection, there sounded the furious clanging of a bell and the police patrol-wagon, filled with officers, dashed up to the scene, having been summoned by one of Old Honesty's sympathizers when the trouble became serious.

Short was the work of opening a way to the boys and quickly was their captive hustled into the wagon, and as it dashed away, Old Honesty shouted:

“You see, my friends, the sort of a man Bement calls to his support. This identification of the fellow, who has tried to break up several of my rallies to-night, as a postoffice robber, should do more to give you an insight into Bement’s methods than anything I can say. Do you wish to be represented at Washington by a man who hires thieves and outlaws to vote and work for him?”

“No! no! We want you, Old Honesty!” yelled the crowd, carried away by the personal force of the sturdy, simple ranchman standing before them.

“Then vote for me!” he replied. And turning quickly, he walked away with his friends, who formed a compact cordon about him.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PROPHECY

SEVERAL of Old Honesty's supporters had rushed in and brought Dave back to the cordon for, with the departure of his companion with the police to complete the identification of the "heckler," the boy had been left in the midst of a throng that quickly recognized his resemblance to the candidate and three or four of Bement's gang were pressing toward him when his father's sympathizers arrived and bore him away.

"What has become of your companion, Dave?" asked the ranchman, as his son rejoined him.

"He went with the police, Dad, to claim the reward."

"How did you happen to be with him?"

"He suggested we go into the crowd to find the disturbers."

"Any idea who the boy was?"

With the asking of the question he had feared,

lest his surprise over the *World's* support of his father be prematurely disclosed, the young ranchman leaned toward Old Honesty and whispered:

“He is Charlie Porter. He’s going to Boniface with me. Please don’t mention his name, others might hear it.”

As the name suggested nothing to the candidate, he turned to converse with his friends, and soon they were once more at the Judge’s house, when his sympathizers bade him good night.

“If we only had a newspaper with us, this evening’s occurrences could be spread broadcast throughout the county and turned into votes for you, Sam,” declared the jurist, repeating Mr. Perry’s wish, expressed before the interview at the bank.

“Surely the papers will not ignore such a sensation?” asked Old Honesty.

“They may not go so far as that, but they will take precious good care not to connect the robber with Bement or to print your words charging the fact.”

“You may be mistaken,” commented the owner of the Double Moon, then turning to his son, he asked: “What was it you said about someone going to Boniface with you?”

“Only that a friend of mine asked if he could go.”

“H’m. I rather think you had best give up the idea, Dave. What do you think, Hand, in view of this evening’s experiences?”

“I think there are votes in Boniface and Palfrey which we need. If someone goes there, we can get part of them. There will be no more danger there than where you are. We can judge better from the attitude of the press, in the morning, however.”

“Then why not wait until morning to decide upon any change in the plans?” suggested Dave, earnestly. And the matter was dropped with that understanding.

Tired from the excitement of the day, Old Honesty and his son were just retiring to their room when the telephone rang.

“Someone to talk to you, Dave,” said the jurist, answering it.

Taking the instrument, the boy heard Charlie’s report that his father had consented to his making the Boniface trip and that he would be on hand to start at six in the morning.

Young Porter, however, did not tell Dave that he had spoken to his father of the vaguely hinted trouble in the border towns or that he had prom-

ised, as soon as he had learned the basis of the fear, to telephone the information to the *World* office. For both editor and reporter were aware of the characteristics of the Boniface and Palfrey inhabitants, and each realized that a situation might quickly develop in which the presence of friends might avert a tragedy. And it was to make arrangements for such a contingency that Charlie was to telephone his father after he had discovered the reason of Dave's misgivings.

An excited rapping on the door of their room, followed by the Judge's voice, asking, “May I come in? May I come in?” aroused Old Honesty and his son to consciousness the next morning.

As Dave realized that the jurist must have seen a copy of the *World*, his courage failed him and he buried his head under the pillow; but not long did he keep it there.

“You are as good as elected, Sam,” exclaimed the delighted Judge, waving a newspaper and capering about like a boy, his dignity forgotten. “The *World*, the cleanest paper in Harker County, has come out in your support. In one of the most bitter attacks I have ever read, Porter, its owner and editor, assails Bement. Why,

man dear, he devotes three pages, three whole pages, to the story of the dam, the mortgage, the calling of the loans, and the exposure of no end of 'crooked' deals in which the president of the Ranch Improvement Company has been implicated. I should like to know where Porter received his information. Just read for yourself."

Old Honesty, however, did not take the proffered paper.

"Porter? Porter?" he repeated. "I've heard that name before—ah!" and reaching out, he shook his son by the shoulder.

"What did you say your friend's name was, Dave?" he asked.

"Charlie Porter."

"Charlie Porter?" exclaimed Judge Hand. "Why, he is Editor Porter's son. I had no idea you knew him, Dave. So it is *you* who gave the *World* the facts, eh?"

"Yes, sir. When you said it would help Dad if he had the support of some newspaper, I went out to find one—and I found Charlie Porter," he added, with a smile. "When I was sure I could trust Mr. Porter, I gave him all the details I could."

"I should like to know how you made that

discovery, Dave,” chuckled Judge Hand. “I should as soon have thought of confiding in Bement himself as in Porter. Why, Porter’s support has held more respectable people to Bement than anyone, or anything else.”

Quickly Dave related the story of the surprising meeting with the young reporter, his call upon the editor, though he refused to divulge the proof he had received, suggesting that Mr. Porter would probably tell his father and the Judge.

“Nonsense, boy, you can tell us just as well,” declared the jurist.

“I am sorry, Judge, but I cannot,” returned Dave, quietly.

“Why?”

“I promised not to.”

“Then keep your promise, son,” interposed his father. “Evidently Porter was sincere or he would not have printed the stories he has,” and he held out the first page on which Dave beheld in big, black letters, extending across the top in two lines:

**“MARCUS BEMENT, BOSS OF HARKER COUNTY FOR 10 YEARS, IS UNMASKED”**

Then followed many headings in smaller type, outlining the stories contained on the other pages.

Eagerly the candidate and his son, fascinated at seeing the story of their persecution set forth in forceful, terse sentences, were perusing the articles when a servant knocked on the door and announced that Mr. Porter and his son were below.

"We can never thank you sufficiently, Porter," exclaimed Judge Hand, shaking the editor's hand cordially as he introduced Old Honesty.

"I reckon it is Dave and Charlie you should thank most," smiled the publisher of the *World*. "However, we will not quibble as to that. You can realize, Hand, what the publication of these stories means to me."

"So that's your game, is it?" exclaimed the jurist; then, in a hard voice, he asked: "How much money do you want?"

"That's not fair, Judge," exclaimed Dave, hotly, and rapidly he narrated the facts concerning the calling of the mortgage on the printing plant, finally saying: "Mr. Porter, I wish you would tell Dad your reasons for your break with Bement."

"Yes, do, Porter," requested Old Honesty. "Dave refused flatly, saying he had promised you not to."

After a momentary hesitation, the editor complied, and as he finished, the jurist exclaimed:

"I beg your pardon, Porter, for misjudging you. You shall have all the financial assistance you need. By noon to-day, I fancy we shall have offers of more money than we need with which to fight Bement, so that we can easily help you out."

"We will help him whether we receive any money, or not," declared Old Honesty. "However, we can arrange that later. I wonder if Bement has seen the paper."

"He has," chuckled the editor. "Less than an hour ago, he was at my house, offering to pay me ten thousand dollars if I would sell him the entire edition so that he could stop the delivery of the papers in the towns to which they have been sent."

"When I refused, he threatened and fumed to such an extent that I went down to the office and ordered another edition printed. It was lucky I did, for while I was there word came in from several towns that the *World* had been seized at the stations and destroyed. You see the chances Bement is willing to take to hold onto his power as 'boss.'

"It is my intention to keep printing the paper, with editions describing the methods to which Bement is resorting to prevent their distribution, and to keep shipping them."

"At last, we have Marcus Bement where we want him," chuckled Judge Hand.

"Don't be too sure of that, Judge," replied the editor. "I happen to know he has sent for Newcomb, who is in Denver, and he has passed the word along to everybody, workman as well as contractor, who is engaged on a federal, State, county, city or town job in Harker County, that he must be nominated or the jobs will be given to someone else.

"Why, he's promised so many men jobs that there will be two or three for every place."

"Has he made any speeches stating his position on public issues?" asked Dave.

"No, nor will he. A 'boss' of Bement's stamp speaks in whispers—and only to his lieutenants. They, in turn, pass the word along to their 'heelers' and the voter soon learns he must vote for Bement or lose his work.

"It isn't the intelligent men who listen to speeches and judge the merits of the candidates that win elections, Dave. It is the men 'in the ranks' who see loss of work, with hunger facing

their wives and children, if they do not vote as they are told.

"The right to vote 'as one thinks,' of which altruists like to talk, is very pleasant to believe in, but few men stop to 'think' when their pocketbooks are affected."

"I know Bement, and I know his strength. If I were you, Roberts, I should lay less stress on winning at the primary than at the final election."

"You mean that Old Honesty cannot obtain the nomination?" interposed Judge Hand, excitedly.

"Not that he cannot, that he probably will not."

"Then what is the use of campaigning any longer?" asked the candidate.

"Why, man, you must run independently!" returned the editor. "The only way to break 'boss' rule is to split the parties. When honest people see an honest man, who has the courage to run independently, they will rally to him, rejoiced at the thought they can vote as they choose, and still hold their jobs."

"Your prophecy may be correct, Porter, but I doubt it," declared the jurist. "I tell you Old Honesty will win the nomination. It will be

time enough to talk about running independently when he is defeated."

"As you will," replied the newspaper owner, realizing the futility of trying to convince a man of the Judge's type. But taking advantage of the jurist being called from the room, he said to the ranchman, "What is *your* opinion? Shall I get enough signatures to ensure your nomination as an independent candidate?"

"I wish you would, Porter. I am in this fight to win the *election*—not the primary."

Judge Hand returned before the two men could talk further, and with him were Lem Mason and the owner of the Barred Circle.

"Here is further proof of Bement's rascality," stormed the jurist. "Bement does not intend to let you discharge the mortgage, Sam. He will not be in Curtis at noon. We must find him before he leaves Sturgis."

"We learned that he intends to meet Bowker at Crossbend this noon, so we rode all night to get here before he started," explained the former Congressman.

"You had best hurry to the hotel if you wish to catch him," counselled the editor. "Bement has arranged to start early."

"How can you learn all these things, Mr. Por-

ter?” asked Dave, who had been treated to one surprise after another as the editor announced the plans and moves the “boss” contemplated.

“You would be surprised if you knew the avenues through which ‘tips’ and important information come to a newspaper,” smiled the owner of the *World*, but more than that he refused to divulge.

And taking their hats, the men hurried away to find the president of the Ranch Improvement Company, leaving the two boys behind.

“Right here is where we start for Boniface,” announced Dave, “or we shall not be allowed to start at all.”

“Reckon you’re right, son,” assented the young reporter. “Things are beginning to hum and we probably would not be able to get away. Come on.”

Cautiously the boys went to the stable, where they mounted Black Bess and Charlie’s pony and, leaving word with the groom to tell their fathers they had gone to Boniface, they galloped away.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE TRIP TO THE BORDER TOWNS

**J**OY in being alive seized the boys as they dashed from the city to the rolling plains in the glorious morning air, and as its crispness and the motion of their ponies sent the blood tingling through their veins, they shouted from sheer exuberance of spirits.

With a seeming understanding, no word was spoken in regard to the campaign, and they laughed and chatted merrily, not even mentioning their trip until the sight of a ranch house brought to the young reporter's mind his father's instructions. He began to ply his companion with questions, first cautiously and then boldly as Dave outlined the conversation he had overheard in regard to the "colonizing" scheme.

"Jove, I should say it did mean trouble, trouble in capital letters, too," he exclaimed when the young ranchman had finished. "I wouldn't miss this lark for anything."

"Then be careful not to spoil it by talking

about it,” warned Dave, in a tone that brought concern to his companion.

Already they were opposite the ranch house, and Charlie knew that if he did not get into communication with his father from it, there would be no other chance before they reached Boniface.

“I’m going in to get some milk, I’m thirsty,” suddenly declared the young reporter, watching his companion to learn how he accepted the announcement as he turned his pony’s head into the dooryard.

“You wouldn’t be much of a hand to ride the range if you get thirsty after this short ride,” laughed the young ranchman. “I can go all day without a drink. Hurry up; I’ll wait out here for you.”

If Dave could have seen the look of relief his words brought to his companion’s face, his suspicions of his thirst might have been aroused, but Charlie lost no time in taking advantage of his opportunity and was soon eagerly telephoning to his father.

Mr. Porter’s delight at the prospective story was no less than his son’s, and when Charlie had finished, he ordered the boys to go to a certain friend’s house when they arrived in Boniface, where he would give them further instructions.

As the youthful riders cantered along the main street of the border town, they decided there must be some celebration afoot. Every hitching rail was lined with ponies of all sizes and colors, and from and into the doors of all the public-houses and stores a steady stream of men seemed to be passing, and the men were as varied as the ponies.

"There's no doubt about the 'colonizing,'" whispered Charlie, as he surveyed the motley throng. "I should like to see Bement when he learns we have discovered his scheme."

"He won't know about it until after the polls close and Judge Hand challenges the votes," returned Dave.

"That's where you are wrong, son. Marcus Bement and the rest of the people in Harker County will know all about it to-morrow morning."

"What do you mean? How will they know?"

"They'll read it in the *World*."

"Then you've 'peached' when I asked you not to," exclaimed the young ranchman, his face taking on an expression Charlie did not like to see. "I think you are the—"

"Easy, son, easy," broke in the young reporter. "You have courage and a pretty level head—but

you are not strong enough to play this game alone. Now, just listen to me. Bement has had these men run in to vote—and vote they will. Fifty men could not stop them. You could protest till you were ‘blue in the face’ and Judge Hand could challenge until he was hoarse, the votes would be counted just the same.”

“But the honest people in Boniface would back me up,” protested Dave.

“Wrong again. The people of Boniface have a healthy regard for their skins, also they recognize trouble when they see it—and you may take my word for it, any toddler in the kindergarten in Boniface can tell you these miners look like trouble. No, son, if you raised a cry of ‘fraud’ at the polls, there wouldn’t be twenty of your ‘honest people’ on the streets in three minutes.”

“But I must do something. I can’t let Bement work his trick when I know about it,” lamented the young ranchman, impressed by the force of Charlie’s statements.

“Of course we shall do something—that’s where I fit in. We’ll nose around Boniface and find out what we can, then I’ll send my information to father and we can go on to Palfrey. In the morning, the *World* will print the story and

Bement's 'colonization' scheme will go up in the air."

Most of this discussion was carried on in the friend's house selected by the editor, and as Dave acquiesced in the plan, they lost no time in returning to the main street.

Not far had they progressed up the thoroughfare when they were accosted by a burly miner.

"What are you kids doin' in this burg? Where'd you come from?" he demanded. "You're none of Newcomb's gang; I know all them."

"We've come to vote at the primary," explained Charlie, hurriedly anticipating his companion, who looked as though he intended to tell the truth.

"How'd you know about *that*?" asked their accoster, his suspicions somewhat allayed by such intimate knowledge of Bement's plan.

"We're not telling all we know," returned the young reporter, quaking lest he might make some blunder that would start an investigation which would culminate in their identification.

"That's the talk. You look the right sort, but you're too young," announced the miner, after further critical inspection.

“What of it? Two votes are two votes—and they may be needed,” declared Charlie.

“Sure you know how to keep your mouth shut?”

“I’d have told you where I learned about your ‘running in’ the miners if I didn’t, wouldn’t I?”

“I reckon you would. As you say, two votes are two votes. It will be pretty ‘raw’ having you kids vote, but so will a lot of things that will be ‘pulled off’ to-morrow. And if anyone makes any objection, why, there are enough of us to see that your votes are counted, savvy?”

“I do.”

“All right—but I’ll only give you half rates, a dollar apiece. Satisfied?”

“Surely,” replied the young reporter, delighted to think he had learned the amount Bement was paying for votes.

“Then go up to ‘Long Johns’ and ask for Tim. Tell him I sent you. He’ll give you the names to vote under. We’re voting ‘dead ones,’ ” and turning on his heel, the man in charge of the colonizing started into a public-house.

“Hold on a minute,” called Charlie. “Suppose Tim asks who sent us, what shall I tell him?”

“Just say ‘Gold-dust Bill.’ ”

“Thank you,” replied the boy, and seizing the amazed Dave by the arm, he led him across the street.

“Why did you do that? I don’t want to vote—and I won’t.”

“Neither do I,” answered Charlie, blandly. “I simply did it to learn who was in charge of the Colorado miners and incidentally I found out the price of votes.

“Come on. I want to talk with Tim and then we’ll jump to Palfrey. Wow! how this will make Bement rage.”

His misgivings allayed, Dave entered into the spirit of gathering all the information possible as to the “colonization” scheme.

Without difficulty, the boys located the resort known as “Long Johns,” and entering they formed in line behind some thirty men who passed, one by one, into a rear room.

Slipping through the door together before the fact was noticed, they beheld a tall individual, eyes hidden behind spectacles, slouched hat pulled down over his face, seated before a table on which lay an open record book and several long slips of paper.

“What are you doing in here?” snarled the

fellow, when he looked up from a strip upon which he had been writing.

“‘Gold-dust Bill’ sent us,” replied Charlie.

Appeased to some extent, the man demanded: “What is it? Time’s short. Speak lively.”

“We came for our voting names, of course.”

“We vote men, not babies. Clear out.”

“‘Gold-dust’ said two votes were two votes—and as we are only to receive a dollar apiece, you and he can divide the other two,” persisted Charlie.

“H’m. I don’t like it—but if ‘Gold-dust’ said so, all right. Only, you won’t get your pay till *after* you have voted—if there’s any kick, you won’t get any.

“You,” and he nodded toward the young reporter, “are Ralph Sommers; your pard is ‘Tom Harris. Get those names?”

“Yes, sir,” chorused the boys.

“Then repeat them,” and as they obeyed, he continued, “Don’t show up at the voting booth until three o’clock. In the meantime, keep out of sight.”

“Any particular place we can go?” inquired Charlie.

“No; we haven’t any cradles. Just keep out of sight till three o’clock.”

"Where shall we receive our money?" asked Dave, determined to play his part, once he had assumed it.

"I'll see you outside the booth, *after* you have voted. Now 'beat it.' "

Elated at their success in obtaining such incriminating evidence against the "colonizers," the boys strolled about the town a while before returning to their stopping-place, which they did with the utmost caution, and when they had eaten a hearty meal, the young reporter telephoned to his father, receiving instructions to ride on to Palfrey.

Being a smaller town, the boys saw fewer men but they were similar nondescripts. Following the tactics which had been so successful in Boniface, Dave and Charlie found the men at the head of the "colonists," sold their votes for the same amount and were assigned the names of men likewise dead.

As before, once they had acquired the information, the young reporter telephoned to his father, but when he had finished, he handed the instrument to his companion.

Varied were the expressions that passed over the young ranchman's face as he held the receiver to his ear, for it was his father, whom

Editor Porter had summoned upon learning the real state of affairs in the border towns, talking to him.

"The danger is nothing so long as I have helped you, Dad," he finally exclaimed. "What? you think we had best leave Palfrey to-night? We will, as soon as the horses rest up. No, I don't want to leave Black Bess here. Besides, it would be better not to start until dark; some of the miners might see us. What? Yes, I know the trail, all right; anyhow, there's a moon from about ten o'clock. . . . Yes, I'll go home and then join you in Curtis at . . . . I shall take Charlie with me. Good-bye. Yes, we'll be careful.

"We must wash down our ponies so long as we are to ride back to-night," announced the young ranchman, as he hung up the telephone receiver. "Do you think yours can stand the return trip, Charlie?"

"I'll borrow a fresh one to make sure," returned the young reporter, and going out to the barn, he arranged with his father's friend for a fresh mount.

As though eager to do its share toward protecting the boys, the night was very dark, com-

selling them to walk their ponies after they had passed out onto the plains.

For some hours they had travelled when suddenly they heard shouts and the pounding of hoofs behind them.

"Quick, out to the right," breathed Dave, and for several minutes, the boys rode away from the trail.

"I wonder if they've found out who we are," exclaimed Charlie, as they drew rein. "We're in for an exciting night if they are on our track."

"Don't you worry; we can lose them in half an hour," returned his companion. "And now keep quiet. We may be able to hear what they are yelling about."

Nearer and nearer came the horsemen, but never a thought did they have of the boys, as the latter soon discovered from fragments of their conversation they overheard, being simply a party of "colonizers" riding over to visit their friends in Boniface.

Deeply relieved, Dave and Charlie quickly returned to the trail, though they put their mounts to a canter and rode with eyes and ears open for other travellers.

At last the moon arose and, assured of its

light, the young ranchman struck out across the plains, riding into Deep Creek Valley just at sunrise, and drawing rein in the Double Moon yard as the family were sitting down to breakfast.

Surprise at the boys' unexpected arrival was mingled with delight as Polly and the others learned of the success of their mission, and merry, indeed, were the young people until it was time for Dave and his friend to start for Curtis to join Old Honesty at the rooms of the election commissioners.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WHO WAS DEFEATED?

**T**HERE was an air of expectancy about the rooms of the election commissioners in the courthouse at Curtis as the boys entered.

In an outer room, half a dozen clerks were busily arranging large sheets of paper bearing the names of the different towns and cities, the latter divided into wards and precincts, in the First Wyoming Congressional District, while another clerk sat at a desk with four telephone instruments in front of him, which he tested from time to time.

Leading from this room was the one occupied by the commissioners, and there Dave beheld his father surrounded by an excited group of men who spoke in undertones, while behind the railing sat the commissioners and several of their friends.

As the boys entered, they were greeted enthusiastically by Old Honesty and his companions,

but the men behind the railing glowered at them.

"How was the story?" asked Charlie.

"Fine—fine," returned Judge Hand. "But it was too serious a matter for you to have kept to yourself, Dave."

"I reckon he and young Porter handled it as well as any of us would have," smiled the candidate.

"Yes, better than some," declared the editor in an undertone, looking toward the jurist.

Further discussion was prevented, however, by a call from the man at the telephones.

"Four o'clock, polls closed."

Instantly silence descended upon the rooms while men of both groups produced papers and pencils that they might tabulate the votes for the respective candidates as they were announced.

As the minutes passed with no reports, however, the men began to talk again in subdued voices, the boys being obliged to detail their experiences to their friends.

At half after five, the chief of police of Curtis, followed by several officers, entered the room, bearing the local ballot boxes.

Almost at the same time, Bement came in and passed behind the railing, never deigning a glance

at the men who were opposing him so earnestly.

For a moment, he conversed with the chairman of the election commission, after which the latter turned to the police official:

“Guard those boxes carefully, Chief; we shall not open them until later.”

“That means Bement intends to count the Curtis ballots according to his needs,” whispered Judge Hand, angrily. “I shall protest.”

Ere he had the opportunity, however, both Old Honesty and Editor Porter seized his arms.

“I told you Bement would count Roberts out,” declared the newspaper publisher. “His holding the Curtis boxes proves it. Now just keep quiet, Hand; there will be time enough to protest later.”

“I never supposed the fellow would dare take such measures,” returned the jurist. “We must circulate nomination papers for Sam as an independent candidate without delay. I’ll get the blanks,” and before his friends could stop him, he had gained the railing and was demanding the necessary forms.

As the arch-boss heard the request, he chuckled, whispering to his companions, who looked at Old Honesty and laughed, gleefully.

An announcement from the tabulating room, however, turned their attention back to the primary election.

"Storrow, Bement, 213; Bowker, 71; Roberts, 215," called the announcer.

"'As Storrow goes, so goes the county,'" quoted Dave, jubilantly; "I—" but the other returns quickly silenced him.

After the results in half a dozen towns and cities had been announced, it became evident that Bowker was not in the running at all, while the contest between Old Honesty and Bement was so close as to surprise even the president of the Ranch Improvement Company, himself.

With only two large towns, outside of Curtis, to be heard from, Old Honesty had a lead of 97 votes, and the excitement was intense.

"Sturgis," called the announcer, "Bement, 111; Bowker, 2; Roberts, 750."

"You win, Sam, you win," shouted one of his followers, whereat the others, unable to restrain their elation, cheered.

"Silence—or the room will be cleared!" roared one of the commissioners.

Instantly Editor Porter recognized the danger.

"Sit tight, men," he continued. "It would

please Bement to count the Curtis ballots with only his friends present. No matter what happens, keep quiet."

Well did the others realize the timeliness of the warning, but as Old Honesty's lead crept from 736 to 800, it was difficult for them to restrain their joy. The vote of Curtis was listed at 1,400 and a third of these could be safely expected for the ranchman.

"Think I'll go out for a stroll," exclaimed Old Honesty. "I'm not used to such suspense. Hand, will you come with me?"

"If you insist, Sam, but can't you stay it out?"

"No."

"Very well. Porter, guard Old Honesty's interests. I will be back as soon as I can."

Nonplused at this action, the occupants of the room stared at one another, whispering excitedly.

"Boniface," suddenly called the clerk at the telephones. Instantly there was silence and all eyes were focused upon Dave and Charlie, for it had not required much time after the publication of the "colonization" scheme for the "boss" and his lieutenants to identify the boys as the young strangers who had appeared in the border towns.

“Bowker, 3; Bement, 0; Roberts, 0.”

A moment there was a hush, then peals of laughter rang in the room.

“Any report of a battle between the Bement and Roberts’ forces?” demanded a voice, whereat there was more laughter.

“What is the registered vote of Boniface?” called the president of the Ranch Improvement Company.

“72.”

“There, gentlemen, is my answer to the base charges that I would stoop to ‘colonization.’ ”

“Palfrey,” interrupted the announcer. “Bement, 82; Bowker 1; Roberts, 0.”

“What’s the registered vote of Palfrey?” demanded Editor Porter.

“35.”

At this statement, proving that the total vote of the town was less by 47 than the ballots cast for the “boss,” there were shouts of “challenge the Palfrey vote!” from all directions, while Dave shouted:

“There, friends, is the proof of the ‘colonization’ scheme which the *World* printed. ‘Gold-dust Bill’ must have got frightened in Boniface and taken his men to Palfrey.”

“Who’s that talking about ‘Gold-dust Bill’?”

demanded a gruff voice and the next moment a burly miner, with holsters and cartridge belt about his waist, strode into the room.

Rapidly his glance ran over the surprised faces until it rested upon Dave.

"There you are, you viper, eh!" he roared. "You would give the game away, would you? Well, you never will have another chance to 'queer' anybody. I've ridden all the way from Boniface to find you and settle with—"

"Officer, arrest this man for buying votes!" shouted Editor Porter, springing in front of Dave.

Sensing a change in the political control of the county and not wishing the son of the rising power to be a victim of their remissness, several policemen sprang toward the enraged miner.

"Marc, Marc, are you going to let me be arrested?" cried the fellow.

"I do not know you, sir," returned the "boss" quietly. "Officers, do your duty."

Stunned by this denial of their acquaintance, the miner gazed about him stupidly a moment, but the pressure of a hand on his arm aroused him.

"So that's the way you turn on your pals, is

it, Marcus Bement? You'll wish you had 'played square' with me.”

Ere he could raise his hand which held one of his pistols, Dave had leaped forward and struck his wrist with a ruler, rendering it powerless for the moment—and in that moment the miner was seized securely and dragged from the room.

“Votes all in except those cast in Curtis,” called the announcer, when the excitement had subsided somewhat.

Quickly Bement leaned toward the chairman of the election commission, who exclaimed: “Chief, open the Curtis ballot boxes one by one and bring them to me. I will count the votes.”

“We demand a representative at the count in behalf of Sam Roberts,” shouted his son.

“You won't get him. I shall do the counting myself.”

“That's not a 'square deal,' Bement, after what Dave just did for you, especially,” exclaimed Editor Porter.

“Well, it goes, just the same,” announced the commissioner after another consultation with the president of the Ranch Improvement Company. “Officer, remove Nelson Porter and Dave Roberts from the room.”

Despairing of his nomination by fair means, the arch-boss was showing his power to obtain it at all hazards, yet before the policeman could carry out his instructions, the editor exclaimed:

"We will go of our own accord, Mr. Officer. Come, Dave." And linking his arm through the boy's, he passed out into the corridor, followed by all of Old Honesty's sympathizers.

In the hallway, the party met the ranchman and Judge Hand, returning.

"It is an outrage!" exclaimed the jurist. "I will file charges against the commissioners."

"Little good that will do to keep Bement from stealing the nomination," declared one of the ranchman's friends. "Sam is beaten."

"On the contrary, he is nearer to being elected Congressman than before the primary," returned Editor Porter. "Bement's repudiation of his henchman will cause his others to think over their positions and if he counts Roberts out, the two stories will not look well in print."

"How can Old Honesty be elected if he loses the nomination?" asked another.

"Wait and see," returned the newspaper owner.

Just as he spoke, one of the tabulating clerks brought word to them that the president of the

Ranch Improvement Company had received the nomination for Congressman from the First Wyoming District by a plurality of 112 votes.

“Sam, you go over to the hotel with Judge Hand and wait for Dave and me,” commanded the editor, again linking his arm through the boy’s and leading him back to the room from which they had just been expelled.

Producing several long papers from an inside pocket he handed them to the young ranchman, saying, “I want you to file these; they are—”

“I know,” exclaimed the boy quickly. “Charlie told me about them.”

As Old Honesty’s supporters entered the room, Bement and his friends paused in their jollification meeting.

“The chairman of the election commission wishes me to announce that, as the eminent Judge Hand pointed out the other day, the election for Congressman from the First Wyoming District is an emergency election,” exclaimed the nominee.

“For that reason, the commissioners have ordered the election to be held three days from today.

“I am sorry, Porter, that this will give you so little time to file the necessary papers for Sam to

run as an independent candidate. I tried to obtain a longer—”

“You need feel no concern,” smiled Dave. “I have here the legal number of signatures, properly attested, to entitle Samuel Roberts to a place on the ballot as an independent candidate for Congressman from the First Wyoming District. And the boy placed the papers upon the railing.

With a snarl, Bement seized them and began to examine the signatures.

“They are perfectly regular and are properly made out,” declared the editor. “Indeed, you will even find that each name has been certified before a notary, instead of the usual certification by the name gatherer,” he added.

Beside himself with chagrin at the failure of his trick to hold the election before Old Honesty could be put in nomination independently, as he believed, Bement again whispered to the chairman, who shouted:

“Officers, please clear the commissioners’ rooms once more. Admit no more people on any pretext.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE KIDNAPPING

THE order of the commissioner, instantly obeyed by the police, prevented all protests from the incensed followers of Old Honesty, but as they flocked to the hotel, the lobby resounded with their denunciations of the "boss" who had ordered the immediate election.

Only the ranchman was calm.

"I reckon it isn't so bad, friends," he declared, when apprised of Bement's coup. "Of course, I was counted out of the nomination. That being the case, my friends and other fair-minded people will be angry over the treatment given me and will cast so overwhelming a vote for me that Bement's henchmen will not dare rob me of the election. On the other hand, if a couple of weeks intervened before election, their anger would cool. Taking it by and large, it strikes me that for once the 'boss' of Harker County has overreached himself."

Loud cheers greeted this statement, and with

many assurances of their votes and promises to vote for the independent candidate, the crowd dispersed, the ranchman with Dave and several of his advisers starting for the Double Moon, while Editor Porter remained in Curtis, where, by the aid of telephone and telegraph, he gave instructions for the "make-up" of his paper.

Though the result of the primary was flashed throughout the county and State long before bedtime, almost everyone was eager to read the *World's* story of the vote—and when they opened their papers the next morning they were not disappointed.

In black letters at the top were the words, "Roberts Will Run as an Independent." While below, in flaring red, making a striking contrast, was the statement, "Bement Summons Newcomb from Denver to His Aid."

Then followed graphic accounts of the primary, the Palfrey vote, the repudiation of "Gold-dust Bill," the counting of the votes in Curtis, and the selection of the date for the election, after which came a repetition of Old Honesty's platform, a resumé of Bement's tricks, and finally his appeal to the capitalist.

Of the hundreds who read the *World*, no one was more surprised than the "boss" himself to

see, in print, the statement of his request to Newcomb for aid.

Surrounded by his most trusted lieutenants, the regular nominee had passed the night at a room in the hotel at Curtis.

First, they had examined the nomination papers which Dave had filed for his father in a determined endeavour to find signatures that could be declared fraudulent, but so carefully had these been obtained and certified, thanks to Editor Porter, they could discover no flaw in them.

Chagrined and desperate, Bement had instructed his workers to use every trick known to “practical politicians” to coerce the voters into casting their ballots for him, and finally had arranged to make a “whirlwind” tour of the county, that by his presence he might inspire his hirelings to greater efforts.

Every now and then, the scheming had been interrupted by speculations as to what the *World* would say about the primary, and the president of the Ranch Improvement Company had sent out several of his henchmen to buy up all the copies of the paper they could obtain.

When a paper had been brought to him and his eyes had rested upon the flaming announce-

ment of his appeal to Newcomb, he had leaped from his chair, groaning:

“How did Porter find that out?” then turning upon his lieutenants, he roared, “Get out of my room, every one of you! Hunt up Crooked Sims and send him to me—tell him to use the back entrance to the hotel.”

Trained to obey, the men hastened to locate Sims, and as they departed, the arch-boss sank into a chair, staring at the red letters.

Once or twice, he essayed to read some of the stories, but he could see nothing but the flaring announcement that he had sent for the head of the land- and water-grabbing syndicate. And not until a timid “You sent for me?” sounded in his ears, did he rouse from his reverie.

Getting out of his chair, Bement walked to the door, opened it suddenly and peered into the hall, but no eavesdroppers did he discover, and with a quick movement he shut the door, locked it and stepped close to Crooked Sims.

“There is only one way I can win,” he breathed. “Something must happen to make Sam Roberts withdraw from the contest. What it is, I don’t care—and you, Crooked, are to see that it does happen!”

“None of that sort of work for me, Marc,” re-

turned Sims, with the easy insolence of one who knows his master's power is waning.

“What do you mean?”

“That you can put Sam out of the way if you want to—I will not.”

“I never suggested such a thing, Crooked. I merely meant that something must be done which will prevent his making a campaign.”

“I won't—”

“Yes, you will, Crooked—unless you prefer to live under the sheriff's protection for the rest of your life.”

For several minutes, the two men glowered at one another, then Sims grunted:

“All right—I'll do anything within reason, but I want some money right now.”

“Here's ten dollars,” said Bement, tendering a bank note.

“Ten times ten is what I want, or I will take my chances with the sheriff.”

A moment the “boss” hesitated, then counted off the money and handed it to his hireling, saying:

“I shall expect to hear by to-morrow night that you have been busy.”

As his henchman departed, Bement, realizing that he must allow nothing of his anxiety to ap-

pear in his face, pulled himself together in a really wonderful manner, descended to the lobby and entered the dining-room, returning the curious glances and occasional greetings with his usual pompousness.

Scarcely had he tasted his breakfast, however, when he was summoned to the telephone.

"This is Newcomb," he heard a voice say. "The rules of the telephone company prevent my telling you what I think of you. I cannot meet you to-day or any other day unless you win your election as Congressman. If you do that, wire me at Denver. Good-by."

Stunned by this blow to his hopes, for he had confidently expected the capitalist would turn many doubtful votes to him, the nominee leaned against the telephone booth, then noting the many eyes riveted upon him, he forced a smile, opened the door and spoke into the receiver:—

"Thank you, Newcomb, thank you. If you will do that, I shall surely win. All right. Much obliged. Good-bye."

This bit of quick-wittedness was a master-stroke, for none of his auditors knew that the capitalist had hung up his receiver before Bement had spoken, and as the sorely-beset man emerged from the booth, he was greeted with

even more deference than he usually received.

Glad was he, however, to leave Curtis and find seclusion in the privacy of the car he had hired for his speech-making tour.

But while the erstwhile proud boss was losing his courage, the candidate at the Double Moon was in high spirits, for he and his advisers, convinced that he had won the primary, believed his election certain.

Nevertheless, Editor Porter, who had hastened to the ranch as soon as he had received copies of his newspaper, cautioned Old Honesty against overconfidence, and it was his advice that decided the ranchman to tour the larger towns and cities in quest of as many votes as possible.

Accordingly, the candidate, Dave, Charlie, Judge Hand and several others set out for Curtis, there to entrain for Crossbend, where it was arranged the campaign should be opened with a rousing rally.

Had the members of the party not been so engrossed in conversation as they rode through the refreshing morning air, they might have seen a thin, weasel-faced head peer at them over the edge of a bend in Deep Creek and watch them until they were out of sight.

Once, the face turned and gazed at a rifle close

at hand, then back to the horsemen—for Crooked Sims realized it would be folly to resort to extreme measures when the owner of the Double Moon was surrounded by so many companions, and he dropped back, striving to think of some other way in which he could accomplish the task set him.

Long he lay in his hiding-place, until suddenly his keen ears caught the distant sound of shrill laughter.

Peering quickly over the bank again, he beheld two riders coming straight toward him.

“‘The Terrors,’ ” he gasped. “If I can only get ’em, I can take ’em to Injun Joe’s, and then Bement can make his terms with Sam. Old Honesty loves them kids better’n his life.”

The task of luring both the boy and the girl within his reach seemed no easy one, however, until he bethought him of their love for hunting.

Snuggling down in the tall grass, Sims barked like a coyote.

The effect was all he could desire. The twins heard the bark, listened for a moment, then raced toward the creek.

Again sounded the bark.

“He must be near that big tree,” cried Bud. “Come on, Peg.”

His keen ears gauging their approach, Crooked suddenly seized his rifle and leaped to the bank, ordering the children to throw up their hands.

Thinking the command but a joke, the twins whirled their ponies. The next instant, Peggy's was rolling on the plain, the girl barely saving herself by leaping free of her saddle.

“Get up behind me,” cried Bud.

With a bound, Peggy reached the back of her brother's pony only to be jerked off by Sims before the boy could get under way.

“Just be quiet and nothing will happen to you,” said the miscreant. “You are going on a little visit with me to a friend of mine.” And when he had bound the children, he returned to the creek, led up his own horse and was soon making a stealthy way to the cabin of the half-breed in the mountains.

## CHAPTER XXV

### DAVE COMES TO THE FRONT

**A**S night drew on without any sign of the children, Mrs. Roberts became very uneasy. In vain, Polly tried to calm her with the suggestion that they had accompanied her father and his cowboys to the Barred Circle. The mother, however, insisted that she had seen them ride away in the opposite direction.

At last, to the girl's relief, Mason and his cow "punchers" came in sight and, running out to meet them, she shouted:

"Are 'The Terrors' with you?"

"No," answered her father.

"Then we must find them. They have been away since early this morning."

By this time, Mrs. Roberts had joined the group of sober-faced men.

"Oh, Lem, please, please search for my babies," she pleaded.

"We will, Ma, just as soon as we can shift to fresh ponies. Act alive now, boys," he com-

manded, dismounting, and giving his rein to one of the men, then turning to Old Honesty's wife, he said with an assurance he did not feel, "Don't worry, Ma. They will probably be here before we get started."

"They won't; I know they won't," moaned Mrs. Roberts. "They never stay away from dinner except when they go to one of the ranches, and I have forbidden their doing that for the present."

Telling his daughter to do what she could to comfort the anxious mother, the owner of the Barred Circle went to join his "punchers" at the corral.

Before all were mounted, however, a horseman was discovered riding toward them at a furious pace.

"It's someone with news from the kids," exclaimed one of the cowboys.

Leaping onto one of the saddled ponies, Mason raced to meet the rider, but so dark was it growing that he had covered only part of the distance when, in fear of overriding his man, he shouted:

"Who are you?"

"Happy Jack. That you, Lem?" came the answering hail.

"Yes. Seen anything of the twins?"

"That's what brought me in. Are they safe?"

"No. We're just starting out to round them up. Quick, man, tell me what you know."

"I found Peggy's mare—shot dead."

"Where?"

"Down by the creek, about fifteen miles."

The rest of the cowboys had come up in time to hear Happy Jack's last two statements, and vigorous were their comments, for they loved "The Terrors," despite the pranks of which they were always the victims.

"Bement is at the bottom of this business—whatever it is," exclaimed Mason, in a tone not pleasant to hear. "I suspect he sent some of his men to kidnap Bud and Peggy. He knows Old Honesty would quit his campaign if anything happened to those children."

"You-all come back to the house and stock up with grub while I round up every available man in the valley to join in the search."

And putting spurs to his mount, the owner of the Barred Circle dashed ahead to break the sad news to Mrs. Roberts, who, to his surprise, bore the blow with great fortitude.

"I have been afraid something like this would happen," she said, between her sobs. "But I

never thought they would steal my babies. It was for Dave and Sam that I feared."

"We'll soon have them back again," said Mason, as he went to the telephone and called up one ranch after another, to which the owners had returned, summoning them to join the searching party. Having mustered these men and their "punchers" he then called up the sheriff in Curtis and the police officials in Sturgis, with the result that in little more than an hour, a hundred fearless, determined men were entering Deep Creek Valley to find and recover Old Honesty's children.

"Aren't you going to send word to Dave, Daddy?" asked Polly, as Mason turned away from the telephone.

"I think it would be wiser not to worry Sam. We shall have Bud and Peggy back safe and sound by morning and—"

"Pa would never forgive me if I did not let him know," interrupted Mrs. Roberts. "Besides, suppose you don't find my babies for several days, what excuse could you give?"

"I reckon you are right," acquiesced the owner of the Barred Circle, and without delay he called up the "Welcome House" at Crossbend only to learn that the ranchman was at a monster rally.

"Then get a note to him. Tell him Bud and Peggy have been kidnapped and that we have men out searching for them. . . . What? . . . This is Lem Mason talking; that you, Snyder? Good. Yes, I am at Sam's ranch. . . . That's fine, Snyder; if you go yourself he will surely get the message. Tell we have men searching already."

Never stopping even for his hat, the man to whom Mason had talked rushed to the hall where Old Honesty was to speak. None too gently he worked his way through the packed aisle, and it was with relief he noticed that the ranchman was seated near the edge of the platform waiting for a local "spell-binder" to finish.

Forcing his way close to the candidate, Snyder beckoned to him and when Old Honesty leaned over, whispered the startling message.

For a moment, the owner of the Double Moon staggered as though he had been struck, then, recovering himself, he hastened to his son, spoke a few hurried words in his ear, grabbed his hat and coat and, beckoning to a couple of his wondering advisers, dashed from the platform and out the rear entrance.

Already impatient to hear Old Honesty, the assemblage became excited at his actions, and

when he disappeared such a hubbub arose that the speaker was obliged to stop.

Wild rumours began to fly about the hall and the men on the platform were as much at a loss as to the cause of the candidate's disappearance as the people in front of them, and this confusion was increased by Dave's apparent stupefaction.

"For your father's sake, boy, if you know what has happened, get up and tell these people," exclaimed Editor Porter, seizing the young ranchman by the shoulder and shaking him. "If you don't say something and quick, nothing can save Old Honesty."

And as if to add emphasis to the newspaper owner's words, cries of "He's quit! Old Honesty's given up the race!" came from various parts of the hall.

Like a lash, the taunts roused Dave.

Leaping to his feet, he rushed to the edge of the platform and instantly the people quieted.

"My father has not quit!" he shouted. "He has just received word that my brother and sister have been kidnapped. As he thinks more of his children than he does of his election, he has gone to join in the search for them."

"Sympathy gag! Old Honesty's playing for sympathy!" shouted several "hecklers."

“My father does not wish the sympathy of such as you,” retorted the boy. “He needs no man’s sympathy. The fact that he prefers to go to help find his children rather than carry on a campaign should appeal to you who have boys and girls of your own. He—”

“Know who stole them?” demanded a voice.

“There is only one man who is so hostile to my father he would strike him through his family, sir. Though we lack the proof, it is a moral certainty that the man who has sought to put down my father by counting him out of an honestly won election at the primary, by hampering his friends, by buying up the mortgage on his ranch, by persecuting him in countless ways, is at the bottom of this kidnapping. I am willing—”

A sudden commotion at the back of the hall interrupted Dave, and as he paused, a stout, middle-aged man pushed his way down the aisle.

“I will not allow this lie to be uttered without casting it back in the speaker’s teeth,” he shouted.

“That’s Bement himself,” exclaimed a voice, and quickly the excited men and women got to their feet, craning their necks for a glimpse of the “boss” of Harker County.

“Yes, I am Bement, Marcus Bement,” the man said, as he heard the words identifying him.

“Put him out! Put the rascal out!” shouted several of Old Honesty’s followers.

“I will be heard!” yelled Bement.

“Yes, gentlemen, let the man speak,” pleaded Dave. “If he can say anything that will clear him from complicity in this kidnapping, I should like to hear it. So please be quiet.”

“I do not need your assistance to obtain a hearing,” snarled the president of the Ranch Improvement Company.

But the hisses and cat-calls that greeted his words gave them the lie.

“Gentlemen and ladies, as a favour to my father and me, please allow this man to clear himself of the charge I have made against him—if he can,” exclaimed the young ranchman.

“Then let him be quick—we want to hear you,” cried a voice.

Livid with anger at the thought that he could not control his audience through his own efforts, Bement shouted:

“Since he sought the primary nomination, Sam Roberts has charged me with all the crimes in the category. I—”

“How about the *World*? Can you answer what it says? Porter used to be one of your right-hand men,” interrupted a voice.

“If you knew Porter as I do, you would not believe a thing you read in his—”

“We want proof, not words,” declared another voice.

“Very well. I had nothing to do with the kidnapping of Roberts’ children because I fight men, not babies. If I were afraid of Sam Roberts’ defeating me, and were the sort of man his supporters claim I am, do you think for a second that I would hesitate to kidnap *him*?”

The shrewd argument made an impression upon the audience and, appreciating the fact, Bement continued:

“I have tried to bear the calumny that has been heaped upon me in silence. I came here to-night because I could not believe Sam Roberts would say the things about me he is reported to have said. I wanted to hear for myself—and I am glad I did come that I may refute this horrible charge.

“My friends, I will tell you the truth about this kidnapping—Sam Roberts and his friends arranged it themselves! Did you notice how opportunely the messenger arrived? What did

Sam do? Did he tell you like a man what had happened?

“No! He spoke to this ‘smart-aleck’ son of his, nodded to a couple of friends and went out—and then this infant prodigy of his sprang the kidnapping story! My friends, Sam Roberts knows he cannot win the election honourably, so he trumped up this charge that I had his children stolen—charged me with the one crime that will move mothers and fathers the most deeply. As someone here truly said, it is a desperate play for your sympathy.

“Deeply as Roberts has wronged me, I am willing to show that I bear him no resentment—if the story of the kidnapping be true—by sending twenty-five of my men to help find his children. Do you think I would do that if I had a share in this dastardly crime? But I tell you that that boy and girl are as safe as you and I are this minute—and Sam Roberts knows where they are. Do you want a man who will stoop to such a despicable trick to represent you at Washington?”

As the “boss” had progressed in his speech, he had carried more and more of the audience with him, and the men on the platform were in despair, consulting among themselves for an answer

to his words, but while they suggested one plan after another, it was Dave who solved the problem. Raising his hands, he checked the demonstration Bement's friends had started.

"You have heard the fair words of this man," he shouted, "but as one of my friends said a while ago, we want proofs, not words. To a person who does not know Marcus Bement, he seems sincere. But I tell you one thing, my father would not accept the assistance of his hirelings. He—"

"He's afraid to!" declared a voice.

"You are right," returned the boy. "He would be afraid they would carry my brother and sister away so they never would be found.

"If you have no hand in the kidnapping, Marcus Bement," and he paused dramatically, then fairly shrieked, "tell me where Crooked Sims is."

The question was a wild one, but Dave realized he was losing the sympathy of his audience, and in desperation he asked as to the whereabouts of the man to whom the "boss" would be most likely to entrust such a mission.

In amazement, the people heard the question, but their amazement was greater when they beheld its effect upon the nominee.

His face was white, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

Quick to see his advantage, Dave shouted: "Why don't you answer me, Marcus Bement? Where is Crooked Sims, the man who blew up your dam?"

Back to the young ranchman swung the audience.

"Answer him! Answer him! Where is Crooked Sims?" rang from all parts of the hall.

"I don't know—I can't keep track of all my men; no one could," gasped Bement.

"Then I will tell you," retorted the young ranchman. "He is guarding my brother and sister whom he kidnapped! Ladies and gentlemen, you see this man cannot deny my accusation. A man who will strike his opponent through that man's family is not fit to represent the First Wyoming Congressional District in Congress!"

"He is not! We want Old Honesty!" yelled the crowd, while others shouted, "Where is Crooked Sims?"

So great was the hubbub that the speakers soon forewent their attempts to quiet it and, picking up their hats and coats, they left the hall from which Bement had already departed.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### BEMENT OBTAINS SATISFACTION

HASTENING back to the "Welcome House," Dave paused only long enough to learn from the manager, who had brought the message to the hall, that his father had caught a fast freight that would bring him into Curtis before daylight. Then he rushed to a telephone booth and called up his home, where he learned from Polly the meagre details known about the disappearance of the twins and heard the plans and number of the searching party.

Obliged to be satisfied, the boy accompanied his advisers to Old Honesty's room, where they held a prolonged consultation.

"We must keep up the campaign," announced Editor Porter.

"But who will draw the crowds, without Sam?" asked Judge Hand.

"Dave, of course. When the *World* comes

out to-morrow, people will be even more eager to see Dave than they would be to see Old Honesty. Moreover, the people in Wyoming know it was he who saved the day at Washington.”

“I grant you that, for I can imagine what you will write—but can the boy influence the voters, or will they just come to see and hear him out of curiosity and then vote for Bement?” persisted the jurist.

“After to-night, I should say he could make votes for his father,” smiled the editor.

“We’ll try it, any way,” assented Judge Hand. “I wish, however, we had something more convincing than our opinions that Bement instigated the kidnapping. If the papers take up his cry that Sam hid his own children to curry sympathy, it will be very difficult to make an answer based on evidence.”

“Just leave that to me,” exclaimed the owner of the *World*, and going to the table, he began a story which made the next issue of his paper remembered for many days.

Dave, Charlie and the others being occupied in studying the time-tables and making out the itinerary for the campaign, Judge Hand went downstairs and sent a lengthy telegram to Sena-

tor Hawk in Chicago, after which he returned to his companions.

"Better go to my room and get into bed, Dave," advised the editor, when the route had been mapped out. "You will have a strenuous time for the next forty-eight hours. Go with him, Charlie; I'll call you in the morning."

Before the owner of the *World* did so, however, the young ranchman was awakened by a bell-boy, who alternately rapped on the door and called "Telegram for Dave Roberts."

"Who can be telegraphing me?" asked the boy, sleepily, as he arose and opened the door, receiving the yellow envelope which he simply stared at.

"Easiest way to find out I know is to open it," chuckled Charlie.

Quickly Dave did so, and as he read the message, he gave a low whistle, then danced about. "Listen to this," he exclaimed, excitedly.

"*'Dave Roberts,*

*'Welcome House, Crossbend, Wyoming:*

*'Am proud of the way you rose to the emergency. Shall act in a way I hope will help you to elect Old Honesty.*

*"THE PRESIDENT,"*

Eagerly the boys read and re-read the telegram and they were still perusing it when Judge Hand and Editor Porter entered.

“We’ve a message from the President in Washington,” cried the young ranchman. “Listen,” and he read the treasured communication, adding, “I should like to know how he heard about last night.”

“I fancy Senator Hawk must have informed him after receiving my telegram,” smiled the jurist. “Hurry, now, and dress, or you will not have time to eat before boarding the train.”

“Got a copy of the *World*, father?” asked Charlie, as he put on his clothes.

“Here it is,” said the editor, handing his son a folded paper.

Hastily the boys opened it and then whistled as they beheld the words, “Where Is Crooked Sims? Marc Bement Will Not Answer. Dave Roberts Charges He Kidnapped Old Honesty’s Children,” which occupied the entire front page.

“That’s rippin’, father!” exclaimed Charlie.

“I am afraid, however, it will cause us trouble. We have no legal proof of the accusation,” commented Judge Hand.

“Time enough to worry about that when Be-

ment produces Sims," returned the young reporter. "What do the other papers say?"

"They back up Bement, of course, printing his speech at the rally in full, and abuse Roberts shamefully," returned Mr. Porter. "Still, they can't answer my question, or Dave's, and I shall keep asking it until Bud and Peggy are found."

"Let's eat," said the young reporter.

"We will," smiled his father, and the four descended to the lobby, where they were joined by the rest of Old Honesty's campaigners, all going to the dining-room except the young ranchman, who stopped to telephone to his home, only to learn that no trace of the twins had been found although his father had joined the searchers.

The meal finished, the party went to the station, where Dave found himself the centre of all eyes. Nor did the interest in him cease when he boarded the train, for his identity was soon made known and people from the other cars crowded into the one in which he was riding, some simply staring at him, while others assured him they would vote for his father.

As the train drew into the town of Harkness, where he was to make a short speech at the station, there was a crowd of several hundred waiting, attracted by the story in the *World*, and as

Dave stepped from the car he was cheered lustily.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for this tribute to my father," he said when the demonstration subsided, only to be greeted by a shout, "It's for you, Dave!" whereat there was a renewed outburst. But the boy paid his admirer no heed, saying: "You are called upon to choose between two men to represent you in Congress, Sam Roberts and—well, you know the other. After what he has done to my family, I cannot bring myself to speak his name."

"A bull's eye! A bull's eye!" yelled an enthusiast.

"There is no better way to prove to you the difference between the two candidates than to tell you what this man, who will not tell where Crooked Sims is, has done to defeat my father. When I have finished, I shall trust to you to vote for the man you think will most fittingly serve the interests of the First Wyoming Congressional District at Washington."

Then the boy briefly related the stories of the Ranch Improvement Company, of the dam, of the mortgage, of the loans, of the Boniface and Palfrey vote, of the ballot count at Curtis, and of the kidnapping.

During the speech, a telegraph boy had squirmed through the crowd to Dave and handed a message to Editor Porter.

As the cheering subsided, when the young ranchman had finished his speech, the publisher of the *World* shouted:

“Friends, I wish to read you a telegram.”

“‘Nelson Porter,

“‘*Campaigning with Old Honesty’s Party:*

“‘I wish you to read this message from me wherever Dave speaks and to give it a conspicuous place in the *World* until after the election.

“‘*I ask all honourable, God-fearing voters in the First Wyoming Congressional District to cast their ballots for Old Honesty. A vote for him will be a vote for me because I need such men as he in Washington to enable me to carry out my plans and defeat the special interests.*

“‘THE PRESIDENT.’”

Wild was the acclaim with which this splendid endorsement of the honest ranchman was received, and amid cheers for Old Honesty, Dave and the President, the train pulled out.

Everywhere the train stopped for any length of time, Dave repeated his speech and the President’s telegram was read.

Once during the forenoon, Bement's special arrived while the young campaigner was speaking.

Appearing on the observation platform of his car with a megaphone, Bement sought to address Dave's audience, but he was quickly driven back inside by a veritable bombardment of “Where is Crooked Sims?” hurled at him from all sides.

After a substantial luncheon in a railroad restaurant, Dave boarded a train on another road, repeating his speech as before. But toward night, he was so hoarse that in order for him to be fit for the final rally at Storrow, he was not allowed to speak, the telegram being read while Dave simply showed himself.

Arrived in Storrow, the young ranchman was alone in his room at the hotel, resting, when word was brought to him that he was wanted at the telephone.

In the belief it was a message from the Double Moon, he hastily descended to the booth. “I am the head worker for Sam Roberts in Blairsville,” he heard a voice say. “There are a hundred voters here, and if you will come over and talk to them you can win seventy-five to your father.”

“But I can't,” replied Dave. “I don't know

where Blairsville is and I have a rally at Storow this evening."

"It's only ten miles; you can ride it in half an hour, talk to us and get back to Storow in plenty of time and with seventy-five votes in your pocket for Old Honesty."

The idea of a brisk gallop appealed to the young ranchman after the tiresome travel in the train and he asked:

"How do I get to Blairsville?"

"Ride south on the street where your hotel is, then take the first cross road outside the city which leads to the right. Blairsville is the first place you will come to."

"All right; I'll be there as soon as possible." And hanging up the receiver, Dave left the booth, passed through the lobby and went out to the stable, where he quickly found a horse that suited him and set out on his way to the hamlet where he was promised the seventy-five votes.

Without misadventure he reached Blairsville, which he found to consist of a score of houses and a general store, where a motley crowd of cowboys and women were assembled.

"Three cheers for Dave and Old Honesty," shouted a voice as he drew rein.

Pleased at the heartiness of the response, the

young campaigner began his speech. Not far had he progressed, however, when a tall man elbowed his way to his side.

"Are you Dave Roberts?" he asked.

"I am," returned the boy, surprised at the interruption.

"Then I arrest you, Dave Roberts, for blowing up the dam of the Ranch Improvement Company, at the western end of Deep Creek Valley."

Too amazed to speak, the young ranchman stared at the man who held a legal-looking document in his hand.

"Come along, don't stand there gawping," ordered the stranger, laying a hand on Dave's arm.

Roused by the touch, which was none too gentle, the boy exclaimed:

"This is an outrage! I had no more to do with blowing up the dam than you had."

"That's nothing to me—you can tell it to the Judge. I was given the warrant to serve, and I've served it. Come along, and lively."

"Where's the man who 'phoned me to come over here? Are you people going to stand for such a trick as this?" Dave asked, looking at the men and women about him.

"Can't interfere with the law," declared someone.

"Law? Nonsense! It's another of Bement's tricks," flared the boy.

"Careful how you speak that name down here," exclaimed the officer, jerking the young campaigner roughly, by way of emphasizing his words.

Realizing the futility of appealing to the crowd, Dave said, "Take me before the justice; he probably has some sense."

"Here I be," announced an evil-faced man, striding forward. "Reckon we can hold court here, seeing that the young gent is in a hurry. What's the charge, Tony?"

"Wilfully and maliciously destroying the dam built by the Ranch Improvement Company in Deep Creek, at the western end of Deep Creek Valley," announced the man who had arrested Dave.

"That's a mighty serious charge, young feller," asserted the justice. "You don't look so desperate, but it won't do to take any chances. Five thousand dollars bail."

"Aren't you going to let me state my defence?" asked the boy.

"You can do that in court when your case is called. Can you give the bail?"

"Not until I communicate with my friends in

Storrow. Just let me telephone and I'll arrange for it directly."

"Sorry, but the telephone wire is down," replied the justice. "Tony, take your prisoner over to Baxter; we ain't got a lock-up strong enough to hold a dynamiter."

In vain, Dave protested against the farcical proceedings, and as he remonstrated, Tony called upon some others to help him, and bound the boy to his horse; he then quickly got another horse and started out for Baxter.

Chagrined at the ease with which he had allowed himself to be lured into the trap which he now realized had been set for him by Bement, the young ranchman rode in silence, refusing all attempts at conversation made by his captor.

And while Dave was being taken, a prisoner, out over the plains, his friends in Storrow were searching high and low for him.

Going to their room, Charlie was amazed to find the young campaigner absent, and quickly went to those of the other members of the party.

Failing to find him, he made inquiries at the hotel desk, but as the night force had come on, he could glean no information and, thoroughly alarmed, he hastened to locate his father.

Dumbfounded, Mr. Porter lost no time in calling on the chief of police.

Summoning the reserves and his detectives, that official stated the fact of Dave's disappearance, had the editor describe the young campaigner, and then ordered the men to go through Storrow with a fine-tooth comb.

"I don't care what you do or how you do it," said the chief, "you must find Dave Roberts."

Returning to the hotel, the owner of the *World* found that the rumour of the boy's mysterious disappearance had already got about, and he was pestered sorely by people who came to him with word that they had seen Dave.

"There would have to be a score of him to be in so many places at once," said Charlie. "What shall you do about the rally, father?"

"Judge Hand and I will address the people briefly after I have stated the fact of Dave's disappearance, I think."

"Wouldn't it be better just to say he was sick?"

"I thought of that, but as this smacks of Bement, it may mean a great deal to have all the people possible looking for the boy. Bement is vengeful and he knows it is Dave who put the President on the track of himself and Newcomb."

The jurist was almost beside himself with anxiety when the two Porters joined him in his room, but under the editor's caustic comments, he pulled himself together, and in due course the party appeared in the hall.

As the men and women failed to see Old Honesty's son, murmurs of disappointment arose.

“You will be more sorry when you learn the facts,” said the owner of the *World*, addressing them. “You have all read or heard how Marcus Bement has persecuted Old Honesty, even having his children kidnapped. What will you say when I tell you that he is at the bottom of Dave Roberts' absence to-night from this meeting?”

At the words, an astonished gasp ran through the audience.

“Some time between five and half after, Dave Roberts disappeared this afternoon. No one saw him go, no one seems to know when or where he went. Although the chief of your police has all his force searching for him, no trace of the boy has been found.

“Under the circumstances, therefore, I deem it best to cut short the rally to-night. I have two requests to make, however, before you go. The first is that if any of you saw Dave between five and five-thirty, or have seen him since,

you will come to the platform and tell me. The other is that when you vote to-morrow, you will consider carefully whether, or not, the man who is at the bottom of these outrages is the man you wish to represent the First Wyoming Congressional District at Washington."

As Editor Porter finished, the people filed from the hall, talking excitedly over the latest development in the remarkable campaign, but as they crowded out, a young girl struggled toward the platform.

Catching sight of her, Charlie rushed to her side.

"Are you coming to father?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you've news of Dave?"

"I don't know whether it is of value or not."

"Never mind that; what is it?" demanded the young reporter, at the same time beckoning to his father, who joined them just as the girl said:

"I'm a telephone operator. About quarter after five a call came from Blairsville for Mr. Roberts."

"Who sent it?" eagerly demanded Charlie.

"I don't know, sir. It came from the store,"

"Thank you, thank you very much, my girl," exclaimed the editor and, without more ado, he and his son rushed from the hall and to the police station.

"Dave received a call from Blairsville at five-fifteen," announced the owner of the *World* when he had been admitted to the chief's office.

Seizing his telephone, the official called for the store at the little hamlet only to learn that the wire was out of commission.

"Looks bad," opined the chief, as he set down his instrument.

"You are right," asserted the editor. "Get some men and we'll drive over."

Hastily summoning ten of his force, the chief ordered his automobile and soon they were speeding toward Blairsville.

Arrived at the general store, all the men jumped out and entered the building, the sight of the officers in uniform striking consternation to those who chanced to be inside.

"What have you fellows done with Dave Roberts?" demanded the chief.

But no one offered any information.

"I'll arrest every one of you, if you don't find your tongues. Speak lively now. Men, close in."

The sight of the advancing policemen was more than one man could bear and he gasped:

“Tony’s taking him to Baxter.”

“What for?”

“He arrested him for blowing up the dam of the Ranch Improvement Company.”

“Who dared arrest him for that?” demanded Judge Hand.

“Tony.”

“And you men let him?”

“He had a warrant.”

“Who swore it out?” asked the owner of the *World*.

“Marcus Bement.”

“What did I say?” exclaimed the elder Porter.

“But why is he not in your lock-up here?” inquired Judge Hand.

“Our justice said it would not hold a dynamiter.”

“Where is this justice?” demanded the chief of police.

“He left about an hour after Tony and his prisoner.”

“In other words, having served Bement, he has run away—and it’s a good thing he has,” declared Porter.

Under more questioning, the story of the ex-

cessive bail, the farcical enquiry, and finally the cutting of the telephone wire, came out.

“Charlie, go with the chief to find Dave; I must go back to Storrow to send this story to the paper,” exclaimed the editor. “Mind, don’t send any word of Dave’s trouble to the Double Moon.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE ELECTION

**A**S the hours wore on without word from Bud and Peggy, Polly grew more and more anxious and restless, until finally, on election morning, in order to obtain relief through violent exercise, she slipped from the ranch house at daybreak and saddled her pony.

Racing madly over the plains, she was startled to see someone moving a red blanket in an evident attempt to attract her attention.

Hand on pistol, the girl whirled her pony and sped toward the object, which, as she drew near, she was amazed to see was a squaw.

"No need shoot, Miss Polly," said the Indian. "You 'member me, Daughter-of-Dew? You nurse me when leg broken. I no forget. Me been trying get away see you. Crooked Sims got twins at Injun Joe's. They kill me if know I tell. You get men and go up. Crooked and Joe, they had too much 'fire-water.' Easy take 'em. Me hide in creek, then go Double Moon

when see men coming with ‘Terrors.’ You no let Crooked or Joe hurt me?”

So overjoyed was Polly at the precious news of the children’s whereabouts that for a moment she could not speak. Quickly she recovered her composure, however, and cried:

“Daughter-of-Dew, you ugly old darling, I would hug you if I had time. I promise no one shall hurt you.”

And quirling her pony she rode with all speed back to the ranch house.

When she was almost there, Old Honesty and her father, returning with a score of men who were going to Curtis to vote, came in sight.

Setting her course toward them, she lost no time in imparting her information, once she had met them.

“But we’ve searched Injun Joe’s cabin twice,” declared one of the men.

“And we’ll search a third time,” exclaimed Old Honesty, setting his mount, with a leap, toward the trail to the half-breed’s shanty.

Willingly his companions followed, and watching until they were out of sight, Polly, light of heart, rode back to the ranch house to prepare Mrs. Roberts for the coming of her children.

On the two other occasions when the searchers

had visited Injun Joe's cabin, the half-breed had seen them coming. Forewarned, Crooked had removed the children to a cave, and Joe, having obliterated all traces of the boy and girl, had stolidly denied having seen anything of them.

This time, however, owing to their condition which the squaw had described, the villains failed to notice the approach of the horsemen, and the rescue party met with no difficulty in finding Bud and Peggy.

The men were for wreaking summary justice upon the kidnapper and his accomplice, but after learning of the early morning interview between Bement and his hireling, Old Honesty intervened, and the miscreants, bound hand and foot, were carried as prisoners to the ranch.

As they rode, the owner of the Double Moon learned with happiness that his children had not been subjected to any hardships or mistreatment. Indeed, they seemed to look upon their experience as a great lark, but when they neared their home and beheld the crowd which had assembled, the news of their recovery having been telephoned broadcast by Polly, they were abashed.

"Have you men voted?" asked Old Honesty, in an attempt to relieve the strain at the reunion of his family.

“Not yet,” announced most of them.

“Neither have I,” smiled the candidate. “Suppose we ride into Curtis now and do so. Come on, Ma, we’ll all go. Dave will be there by the time we arrive; and if I am elected, we can have a celebration.”

At the mention of his son, men and women alike grew silent.

Noting the fact in amazement, the ranchman asked: “Has anything happened to Dave?”

In answer, Polly placed a copy of the *World* in his hands.

Scarce able to believe his eyes, the owner of the Double Moon read of the decoying of his son to Blairsville, and the action of the fugitive justice.

“Haven’t they found him yet?” he asked. “My eyes trouble me so I can’t see to read,” he pleaded, as tears blurred his vision.

Ere anyone could answer, the telephone rang.

Quickly Polly sped to answer, while the people outside listened breathlessly.

“Oh, Dave, is it really you?” she cried, in delight. “And you are not hurt or anything? I’m so glad. Wait and I’ll call your mother and father. What? Yes, we found Bud and Peggy this morning. What? The train is starting?”

All right, we'll meet you in Curtis? Really? Your father has a lead of two—what? Oh! already? Hooray!"

And hanging up the receiver, Polly danced out to tell the people that Charlie had overtaken the young ranchman at daybreak, had carried him back to Storrow and that he was just starting for Curtis.

"Thought I heard something about the vote for Sam," observed her father.

"So you did. I was so happy about Dave I entirely forgot. He said Old Honesty already has a lead of two thousand votes."

"Three cheers for our next Congressman!" shouted the owner of the Barred Circle, and they were given with a will.

"Don't be too sure, friends," smiled the ranchman.

"Suppose we all go over to Curtis where those of us who have not voted can do so and then we will all go to the station to meet Dave."

Readily the people agreed, and in due course the cavalcade entered the county-seat, Old Honesty riding at the head, flanked by Bud and Peggy.

As the townsfolk recognized the rugged ranchman and his son and daughter for whom he had

abandoned his campaign, they sent up a mighty cheering which was repeated continuously as they proceeded to the courthouse.

“Mr. Congressman, I congratulate you,” said the chairman of the election commission, stepping forward to greet Old Honesty as he entered the commissioners’ rooms.

“Is this another of your little jokes?” asked the owner of the Double Moon.

“It is not. Even if Bement doubles his vote between now and four o’clock, he cannot overcome your lead.”

“Which shows that the people can be trusted to do what is right, if they only have the opportunity,” replied Old Honesty. Then turning to the men and women who had crowded into the rooms, he said, “My friends, I have a favour to ask of you. I—”

“Name it!” chorused the crowd, in a roar.

“I want you to come down to the station to meet Dave with me.”

With shouts of approval, the people signified their willingness and, as it was almost train time, they formed in line and marched down to the railroad.

As Dave appeared on the steps of the car, Old Honesty seized his hand and shouted: “My

friends, I want three cheers for the one without whose loyalty and courage I could never have been elected as your Congressman."

The cheers were given with a will, and then three times three.

"Speech! Speech, Old Honesty!" shouted excited voices.

At first the ranchman declined, but so insistent became the calls that he finally mounted a baggage truck.

"My friends, I thank you for your votes. I will try to represent you creditably at Washington. But I don't mind telling you that, now I have my family once more about me, safe and sound, I should not mind if I had not won the election. I have learned, during the last few days, that flesh and blood stand before political honours with me."

As Old Honesty finished, Dave, who had been talking with one of the election commissioners, took a piece of paper from him and mounted beside his father, saying:

"You can understand my pleasure in announcing to you the official vote for Congressman from the First Wyoming District. Bement, 3,405; Bowker, 1,715; Samuel Roberts, 9,372."

Cheers followed this announcement of the over-

whelming victory, and until Dave and Old Honesty set out for the Double Moon, they were given an ovation wherever they appeared.

Already apprised of the fiasco at Blairsville, the erstwhile boss of Harker County was speeding toward Curtis in his private car when he received a telegram from one of his trusted lieutenants, stating that Bud and Peggy had been found and that Crooked Sims had confessed.

Realizing that Wyoming was now too small for him, Bement slunk from his car at Crossbend, sought out a friend, disguised himself, and when night came, made his way across the State line.

As soon as he received his credentials, Old Honesty went to Washington, taking Dave as his private secretary, and both are to-day bringing honour to their district and to the President who befriended them.

THE END



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